



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

ENCOUNTERS WITH ANDROGYNY -
THROUGH THE VISUAL PRACTICE OF CHAU, WILSON AND BESS

by
Kenneth Chau (BFA Photography (Honours))

Degree of Master of Philosophy in Fine Art
The University of Edinburgh

2014

© Kenneth Chau 2014

ENCOUNTERS WITH ANDROGYNY -
THROUGH THE VISUAL PRACTICE OF CHAU, WILSON AND BESS

by
Kenneth Chau
www.kenneth-chau.com

Author's Declaration

I, **Kenneth Chau**, confirm that this work, submitted for the Degree of Master of Philosophy, is my own and is expressed in my own words. Any use made within it of the works of other authors in any form (ideas, text, figures, tables, etc.) is properly acknowledged at the point of their use.

At no time, during the registration for the Degree, have I been registered for any other University award and the work submitted has been carried out, solely, whilst registered and has not been submitted for any other award.

Signed:

Date:

Word count of main body of thesis: 23 716

Abstract:

The thesis examines how aspects of androgyny¹ have influenced the creative practice of Kenneth Chau, Martha Wilson and Forrest Bess. It describes how each of these artists have used androgyny as a means of entering a higher state of mind aiding them in their respective visual narratives.

Each of the three artists use different mediums for their artworks – Bess was a painter, Wilson is a performance artist, and Chau employs both photography and performance.

This thesis will begin with a brief history of androgyny in contemporary culture, followed by a section contextualising androgyny against critical and scholarly discourse. It continues with three case studies, first with Chau exploring aspects of human behaviour and in particular androgynous behaviours expressed in his major body of work. As part of the completion of the thesis, there is a portfolio of Chau's major work entitled *restraint & hijara*, consisting of 14 photographs, 10 enlarged contact sheets, and 3 film stills, which were all created primarily to articulate the original term *performed-androgyny*. This is followed by a case study of Wilson's performances and knowledge of androgyny. Wilson questions through her work whether or not the concept of

¹ By definition, androgyny is defined as an individual that has both male and female characteristics; the individual appears to be neither strongly male nor female (Oxford Dictionary 7th Edition, Oxford University Press). In the context of this thesis, the focus on androgyny relies on an individual's behaviours rather than physical traits.

androgyny could be politically driven due to her gender and appearance. The case studies conclude with a critique of Bess' works, but also how Bess' expression of androgyny was misguided and ultimately led to his demise. All three share the common thread of using aspects of androgyny in their works. Androgyny is a concept that can be expressed and understood through almost any discourse or subject. Specifically addressing these three artistic practitioners and their shared sensibility for androgyny was the primary catalyst that instigated this research.

Table of Contents	Page
Author's Declaration	4
Abstract	5
Table of Contents	7
List of Figures	8
Introduction	9
Chapter 1: Androgyny Examined	14
1.1 Introduction	14
1.2 Androgyny in Contemporary Media	20
1.3 Androgyny in Context	35
Chapter 2: Kenneth Chau	43
2.1 Background: Previous Works and Beginnings of <i>restraint & hijara</i>	43
2.2 Methodology: The Subject	50
2.3 Hijara	57
2.4 Format	60
2.5 Performed-Androgyny	60
2.6 Reactions	61
Chapter 3: Martha Wilson	63
3.1 Background	63
3.2 Wilson's Foreign Emotions and Correspondence	69
3.3 Our Correspondence and Initial Ideas of Performed-Androgyny	75
Chapter 4: Forrest Bess	78
4.1 Background	78
4.2 Bess' Surgeries	83
4.3 Bess' Symbols: Four Works	88
Chapter 5: Conclusions	103
Acknowledgements	106
Bibliography	107
Appendix A – Interview with Martha Wilson Transcript	111
The Assistants	124
Appendix B – Interview with Patty Ng About Assisting and Process	125
Appendix C – Interview with Dee Chaneva About Assisting and Process	128
Appendix D – Interview with David Stinton About Assisting and Process	132
Appendix E – Interview with Demelza Kooij About Assisting and Process	135
Appendix F – Portfolio of Works: <i>restraint & hijara</i>	139

List of Figures

	Page
Chapter I	
Figure 1 – Yin and Yang Symbol	24
Figure 2 – Seated Guan Yin Bodhisattva	26
Figure 3 – Andy Warhol, <i>Silkscreen of Tina Chow</i> , Silkscreen, 1985	27
Figure 4 – Andy Warhol, <i>Tina Chow</i> , Silkscreen, 1985	27
Figure 5 – Cover of American magazine <i>The Candydate</i> , featuring Connie Darling	27
Figure 6 – Two film stills featuring actress Tilda Swinton in Sally Potter's <i>Orlando</i> , 1992	28
Figure 7 – Mr Kurei or Benthén. Illustrations courtesy of Ejichio Oda	29
Figure 8 – Cover of <i>Salome</i> Illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley, 1907	33
Figure 9 – Detail from Gustave Moreau <i>Oedipus and the Sphinx</i> , Oil on canvas, 1864	34
Figure 10 – Kano, played by Japanese Actor Ryuhei Matsuda in a scene from <i>Gohatto</i> , 1999	38
Chapter 2	
Figure 11 – Kenneth Chau, <i>Jesse's Aid</i> , Polaroid, 2005.	45
Figure 12 – Kenneth Chau, <i>It's a Boy!</i> Polaroid, 2005	45
Figure 13 – Kenneth Chau, <i>Luna Regnum: Homage, Family Portrait</i> , 2007	47
Figure 14 – Kenneth Chau, <i>restraint & hijara: rock study</i> , 2010	49
Figure 15 – Kenneth Chau, <i>restraint & hijara: rock study</i> , 2010	49
Figure 16 – Kenneth Chau, <i>restraint & hijara: ribbon study</i> , 2010	50
Figure 17 – Kenneth Chau, <i>restraint & hijara: clover study</i> , 2010	57
Figure 18 – Takeshi Ishikawa, Portrait of a Hijara woman, 1995	59
Chapter 3	
Figure 19 – Lawrence Weiner, <i>An Accumulation of Information from here to There</i> , 1969	65
Figure 20 – Martha Wilson, <i>Breasts Form Mutated</i> , Black and white photographs, 1972	68
Figure 21 – Martha Wilson, <i>Posturing Drag</i> , 1972	69
Figure 22 – The former members of <i>Disband</i> reunite 40 years later to perform.	70
Chapter 4	
Figure 23 – Forrest Bess, <i>Seascape with Sun</i> . Oil on canvas, 1947	79
Figure 24 – Three different kinds of Hypospadias.	85
Figure 25 – Photograph of Bess' self-inflicted surgical procedure	86
Figure 26 – Chart Depicting Bess' symbols	88
Figure 27 – Forrest Bess, <i>Untitled (No. 14)</i> , 1951	90
Figure 28 – Forrest Bess, <i>Before Man</i> , 1952-53	92
Figure 29 – Forrest Bess, a drawing from <i>The Ballet</i> , 1953	94
Figure 30 – Forrest Bess, a page from <i>The Ballet</i> , 1953	96
Figure 31 – Forrest Bess, <i>Untitled</i> , 1970	101

Introduction

The hypothesis of *Encounters with Androgyny* questions how the research will employ literary and critical perspectives in order to help argue and question if androgyny is beyond a physical state and exists as a higher, spiritual state of mind. This particular sensibility and interest in androgyny existing as a higher state of mind is present in the my own photography and performance-based work of Kenneth Chau, feminist performance artist and social activist Martha Wilson and abstract expressionist painter Forrest Bess. This suggestion moves beyond normative gender binaries, and from the perspective of these artists, aiding them in producing their larger bodies of works. It is an endeavour that can at times be ambiguous due to its use of overlapping terminology, academic theories, and the addition of the questions presented by gender and queer studies.

Chau, Wilson, and Bess are seemingly disparate artists whose works span roughly over a 100-year period. They share very few similarities in terms of aesthetics, process, and concepts. However, their shared sensibility for androgyny binds the three artists together. Chapter 1 is entitled *Androgyny Examined*. It will establish the context of this particular encounter with androgyny. In addition, it will also provide a shortened biography of Chau, Wilson, and Bess before their respective case studies. The year is 2014, and androgyny carries a very different definition from when Bess first learned the term in the early 20th century. In its current incarnation, the term can be seen

as a trend topic, most evidently brought on by the fashion industry's interest in appropriating social issues, and showcasing the sartorial qualities of androgyny for commerce². Although this is not the first time the fashion community has made an issue into a commodity, this will not be the focus of the thesis. The research will move away from *androgyny in fashion*, as it does not provide either the correct context or the correct terminology to examine the works by Chau, Wilson and Bess. There will be a section dedicated to the idea of how androgyny has evolved and adapted in contemporary media, but the research will mostly stress the academic discourse and existing criticisms of androgyny coming from interdisciplinary realms including queer, feminist, and sociological scholarship.

Chapter 2 focuses on the creative practice of Kenneth Chau (1985 – present), and the major work that he has contributed toward this thesis exploring the self-portrait and his encounters with androgyny. It will first include the origins of his interest in dualities and how this has evolved over time. Chau, who is also the author, presents his main body of work, entitled *restraint & hijara* (2010 – present), an ongoing self-portrait study that explores aspects of androgyny, gesture, self-reflection, and conflict. It is a character study of inquiry documented by using vast landscapes, rituals, sexually ambiguous costume, and melodrama. Beginning in 2010, through this project, Chau questioned voyeurism and duality, allowing him to have the ability to

² Vogue International Editor Suzy Menkes, elaborates on this trend in an article entitled *Jil Sander: a Return to Androgyny* published on the 21st of September 2014 in *German Vogue*. Menkes describes the designer as the “founding mother of fashion androgyny.”

journey between two selves, two places, creating his own mythology. His practice is interdisciplinary, employing both photographic and performance-based technique, and views these dual parts to be imperative to his methodology in order to create *restraint & hijara*. The research will uncover how Chau's interest in the hijara people, gesture, and non-verbal communication was manifested and expressed in his body of photographic work. Through Chau's practice and methodology, the original term *performed-androgyny* was introduced in order to describe the specific multidisciplinary work he presents in *restraint & hijara*. Featured are excerpts from conversations between Chau and his photographic assistants, as they were the only people who witnessed the performed-androgyny; the conversations will also aid in bringing forth any specific technical aspects of the photographic project. Chau's editing process is showcased in the portfolio section. The works are shown in both single image and enlarged contact sheet format. These choices and the editing process are of great importance, as Chau had produced more than 1000 images for *restraint & hijara*.

The research presented in Chapter 3 will focus primarily on the practice of the performance artist Martha Wilson (1946 – present), followed by Chapter 4, which will focus on abstract expressionist painter Forrest Bess (1911 - 1977). The two case studies will first describe in detail (in similar fashion to Chapter 2), how aspects of androgyny informed their work. For Wilson it is suggested from a series of self-reflective moments and her interest in sociology and feminism; while for Bess it is suggested through spirituality, other worlds, and

mental illness. Similarly, all three artists are drawn toward the unknown. These concepts become the core thematic elements that shape each artistic practice. The shared sensibility between the three artists is that they have recognised at one point in their methodologies that androgyny is a higher state of mind, and this transgressive state has aided the visualisation of their practice. A young Martha Wilson felt the socio-political events of her time drove her toward an interest in performance and androgyny; and her work carries with it a political intention. In an interview she elaborates on how androgyny could mean gender equality. Bess, however, was obsessed with the history of the hermaphrodite and the androgyne. His personal research led him to feel that solving the ambiguous, foreign, and unknown symbols provided him a visual narrative and clarity for a higher state of belonging. Chapter 3's case study on Martha Wilson begins with Chau's own encounter with Wilson, and will feature an anecdote from their one-on-one interview and performance shared between the two. Conveying androgyny in a creative practice is both a collaborative and self-reflective exercise that requires various modes of practice and engagements. It will critically examine some of Wilson's performance work. She describes her intention in doing these performance pieces as to experience 'foreign emotions' allowing her to live vicariously through these bodies. Wilson further explains her methodologies and the influence that sociologist Erving Goffmann's book *The Presentation of the Self in Every Day Life* had on her creative practice. Furthermore, Wilson discusses Franklin Furnace Archive, her pioneering foundation that preserves performance art.

Chapter 4's case study on Forrest Bess will focus on his particular methodology. Specifically, Bess found androgyny and the hermaphrodite to be fascinating. He researched the topic on his own for years, creating his own world while collecting pieces of information and hoarding them in his small shed in Texas. Bess was never formally educated, and his obsession with finding documentation on the androgyne and hermaphrodite is evident from his personal letters. Using these letters as a primary resource, where his daily life, curiosities and insecurities were laid bare; some included correspondences with acquaintances that lasted over twenty years. The Bess section focuses on his definition of androgyny, the origins of his knowledge, his obsession with aboriginal tribes and becoming a 'super human'³; which was Bess' ultimate goal and focus for most of his adult life.

In the short time between the viva and completion of this thesis, the term androgyny has been used en-masse. As mentioned earlier, it is used mostly in the fashion industry colloquially describing physical features of the models and the designer's subsequent clothing collections. However, it is important to regard this thesis as a study of androgyny and its subsequent behaviours and its relation to the three specific artists. The conclusion in Chapter 5 will describe whether or not each artist was successful in applying androgyny during his or her specific encounter.

³ A mid 19th century French term that explored the idea of having one body (man) and be endowed with all the knowledge of the world and its history.

Chapter 1 – Androgyny Examined

1.1 Introduction

All three creative practices use different methods: Chau is a photographer and performance-based artist; Wilson strictly uses performance methods; and Bess is an abstract expressionist painter, and some might argue an outsider artist⁴. The timeline shared between the three is roughly over 100 years, and yet androgyny has continuously emerged as the constant common thread between them. Firstly, my goal here is to present a clear context of what androgyny is, and how androgyny has been previously critically examined. The research will then present its current state in contemporary culture. With the inclusion of three case studies and the addition of scholarly and critical perspectives, the research will help argue and question if androgyny is beyond a physical state and is a higher, spiritual state of mind. The three case studies will investigate and question how androgyny offers this higher spiritual state of mind, and how it has aided in the artistic practices of Chau, Wilson and Bess. This suggestion moves beyond the normative gender binaries, and from the perspective of these artists, has aided them in producing their larger bodies of work.

⁴ Outsider Art – a 20th century history of art classification of artists who practice artwork beyond accepted boundaries of culture, away from the public, and most often unaware of their talents.

Androgyny is a topic of interest that can fall under many areas of research and academic discourse. Providing clarification to attach the appropriate context and history, and using the correct terminology is imperative in this body of research and the practices of Chau, Wilson, and Bess. It is important to make these distinctions, as androgyny has the potential to be vague. For example, in Chapter 4: Forrest Bess, the terminology is paramount. As it will be further explained, Bess' belief that androgyny could offer an apparent higher spiritual state of mind led by a series of primitive self-mutilating surgical procedures which led to his untimely, accidental death. It can be argued that these perspectives were predominately controlled by what are considered to be the norms of the day. Although the research presented does take on some norms – when these norms are applied to Bess' approach we can then see where his motivations and intentions went awry.

Before the thesis is presented, the research must simplify the differences between androgyny and hermaphroditism. The two terms are derived similarly from the same Ancient Greek myth: 'androgyny'⁵ translates from Greek as *andro* as male, and *gyne* as female; 'hermaphrodite' is derived from the Greek demigod *Hermaphroditos* who was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite. According to the myth, the water nymph Salmacis and Hermaphroditos became fused as one body after a proclamation of love brought the two bodies, and genders, together.

⁵ Androgyny – an androgynous individual (Oxford Dictionary 7th Edition, Oxford University 2005).

These terms, in some cases, are analogous, but in respect to this thesis, androgyny will focus on an individual whose appearances and *behaviours* are neither masculine nor feminine; these behaviours are learned and are then performed through the artists' specific methodology, resulting in their works. Hermaphrodite, however, is focused on the physical state of the individual's genitalia – this will be further described in case study of Bess, and in Chau's initial research on the *Hijara*⁶ people, a transsexual⁷ subgroup of people in India. Alternatively, androgyny can also potentially refer to the physical description of an individual, and within the realms of contemporary culture, this is the definition. From the perspective of anatomy, it could be argued that the primary difference between the hermaphroditic and the androgynous are that hermaphrodites are individuals or groups of people who are physically intersex⁸ resulting from chromosomal mutations that lead to deformed physical attributes. However, in respect to the thesis, physical androgyny is of less importance, and rather, it is the behavioural aspects that makes the individual androgynous. Distinguishing androgyny as the behavioural state and a

⁶ Hijara are a subculture of Indian transsexual, their role is seen as both living deity and social pariah. They are present amongst important cultural rituals including weddings, funerals, and childbirth. More information will be provided in Chapter 2.

⁷ Some Hijara individuals identify themselves as transsexual, and exhibit behavioural qualities associated with androgyny. By definition transsexual "is an individual an individual who feels emotionally that they want to live, dress, etc., as a member of the opposite sex, especially one who has a medical operation to change their sexual organs" (Oxford Dictionary 7th Edition, Oxford University Press, 2005). The individual may experiences those internal struggles but has proceeded with the medical operations and subsequent hormone therapy needed to find his or her within societal binary gender norms.

⁸ Intersex is defined as the abnormal condition of being intermediate between male and female (Oxford Dictionary 7th Edition, Oxford University Press, 2005).

hermaphrodite as the physical state provides a simpler understanding of the terms, but also helps in understanding that these terms do evolve and shift with each generation.

As stated earlier, the intent of the thesis is to question whether or not Chau, Wilson, and Bess' similar sensibilities toward androgyny aided in the production of their major works. By tracing this timeline the research has placed Chau's practice of androgynous behavioural studies in photography within the early 21st century, Wilson representing the mid-20th century, and Bess as the pioneering example in his engagement with androgyny in the early 20th Century. Each encounter shows how malleable androgyny can be through a specific context, for example, Bess dedicated a lifetime of research on the topic, analysing its origins, and writing an androgyny manifesto,⁹ informed by his lifelong correspondences with intellectuals of the time, such as Ernest Shapiro, his gallerist Betty Parsons, and an obsession with Australian aboriginal symbols. His struggle with sexuality helps explain the motivation behind his actions, causing him to self-perform two surgical procedures ~~on himself~~ as a disappointing anticlimactic answer to his spiritual understanding of androgyny. He was often heard stating he needed to find the "key to [his] riddle" (Smith, Chuck, *Forrest Bess: Key to the Riddle*, pp 6).

⁹ There is no physical copy of the *Untitled Androgyny Manifesto*, as one copy was lost in the mail described in a letter by Bess. However, the Preface of the thesis survives where Bess begins to discuss how he "descends into the underworld...[and that his] belief that the hero looks at the underworld part of his own body...[with] mutilated [genitals], thereby becomes the pseudohermaphrodite. (Smith, pp 83).

In contrast, Wilson grew into prominence during critical social and civil rights movements in 1970s America, in particular the rise of feminism, and public condemnation of the Vietnam War. Catalysed by her anti-war sentiments, and depressed with her academic and personal life¹⁰, Wilson was motivated to pursue a career path as a visual artist after a chance meeting with artist Vito Acconci.¹¹ This will be further elaborated in Wilson's case study in Chapter 3, where she describes the relevance of androgyny within her own practice, questioning its origins and encounters. Wilson's interpretation is perhaps more political in its intention compared with Bess' self-motivated processes.

Chau's practice explores the behavioural aspects and gestures of the androgyne. It is a self-reflective process involving the interdisciplinary practice of photography and performance-based techniques. These works are expressed in a series of episodic self-portraits primarily documented in external landscapes of significance, and are presented as single images or in enlarged contact sheet format. His interest in androgyny is derived from an intrinsic curiosity in duality and triality¹². In the context of the research, duality plays two parts in his practice, first in the performance of an androgynous figure, but

¹⁰ Then a writing major, Wilson's PhD proposal was rejected at the time and a romantic relationship had just ended pushing her to explore new aspects of her creative practice.

¹¹ Vito Acconci (1940 – present) is an American designer, landscape architect performance and installation artist. He was the artist in residence at the Nova Scotia Design and Art School. Wilson was teaching English at a neighbouring institution.

¹² Triality – a mathematical term describing the relationship between the three elements or more characters (primarily between the self and the camera) in a single performance based work. This unfortunately was only experimental and not successful.

also the role of practitioner and subject. This will be further discussed in Chapter 2, where the research will focus on the methodologies of Chau's creative practice and major works.

As previously mentioned, the semantics alone hail from Ancient Greece. Throughout antiquity, particularly Ancient India and Ancient China, there was a special interest toward androgyny within these Eastern philosophies; many of their respective deities were androgynous. As these three case studies are only a small example of how androgyny is expressed and applied through creative practice, it is important to remember that androgyny is not a new concept. It belongs within the canons of various academic discourses, including queer, feminist, sociology, and botany¹³ to name a few. Contemporary androgyny has gained a platform, and is significantly more present and relevant in the realms of society, commerce, fashion, social media, television, and film. The author is very much aware of the scientific definition of hermaphrodite within the already mentioned academic discourses of botany, as well as various other zoological studies.¹⁴

Thus, using the terms androgyny and hermaphrodite in the context of the research, this thesis will only engage with Chau, Wilson, and Bess' creative practices as examples. The literary and scholarly materials referred to in the research will exclusively apply to their major bodies of works. The next section

¹³ Botany defines hermaphrodite as a bisexual plants with stamens and pistils in the same flower. (Beentje, Henk. *The Kew Plant Glossary*, p 57).

¹⁴ In most species of plants, various worms and some fish are hermaphrodites. These organisms use this specific sexual characteristic for sexual reproduction.

will describe androgyny's presence in contemporary media, following research on androgyny's place within academic criticism and discourse.

1.2 Androgyny's Presence in Contemporary Media

Androgyny has recently experienced a resurgence of interest in contemporary culture by means of the fashion, music, and film industries. Celebrities such as David Bowie, Tilda Swinton and other popular figures are gaining prominence for their androgynous physical features. Bowie's costume retrospective and exhibition, entitled *David Bowie Is....*¹⁵ was presented at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 2013. It included the iconic singer's costumes and androgynous personae, as well as personal items. With her almost indeterminate physical gender facial features, Scottish actress Tilda Swinton continues to push the boundaries of being a performer who engages with androgyny in various film and stage work.

The marketing and commercialisation of these aspects have allowed the concept to evolve from its primordial origins into a term popular amongst individuals in these aforementioned industries. As androgyny originates from ancient civilizations, mythology, and Eastern religious theory, these new manifestations allow the concept to demonstrate its adaptability within contemporary media. Over time, androgyny has been revisited and reformed.

¹⁵ *David Bowie Is...* was presented at the Victoria Albert Museum.
Exhibition Dates: 23 March – 20 August 2013

The presence of androgyny appears in a multitude of disciplines within academic and scholarly discourse. Whether it's being made reference to in women's studies, addressed in queer theory, or within socio-psychological discourse, androgyny's malleability makes it a very stimulating area of research. This will be further examined in section 1.3.

Because of their behaviours, androgynous humans are considered to be of an indeterminate sex. The androgyne falls out of the traditional spectrum of the accepted gender binary of the male and female sexes. Romanian philosopher Mircea Eliade (1907 – 1986) in his work entitled *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom* (1957) describes androgyny as an act to “transcend the opposites....it is the integration of the primordial androgyne, the conjunction in one's own being of male and female. [It is] the re-conquest of the completeness that precedes all time” (Eliade, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom* pp 257). However, years later, from his 1962 entitled *Méphistophélès et l'androgyne* (1962) Eliade poorly generalises that for the followers of the 19th century Decadent Movement, “the androgyne is included only as a hermaphrodite in which both sexes anatomically and physiologically coexist” (Eliade, *Méphistophélès et l'androgyne* pp 123). This is just one of many examples of the ongoing dispute and confusion between the hermaphrodite and androgyne. The two terms do overlap within history and without clarification can often be greatly misunderstood. In order to understand which behaviours Eliade described the “primordial androgyne,” it is first imperative to look at the origins of the term. As mentioned in the introduction, the terms hermaphrodite and androgyny are

frequently and analogously used in scholarly discourse because of a shared lineage stemming from Ancient Greece. Androgyny transcends the traditional male/female duality as the individual embodies both sides of humanity; it is the interaction and reciprocation between masculine and feminine behavioural characteristic and traits.

The following are stereotypical qualities of masculinity and femininity that are “highly consensual norms and beliefs about the different characteristics of men and women (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz & Vogel, 1968).

Men (Masculinity) – aggressive, independent, unemotional, objective, dominant, competitive, logical, adventurous, decisive, self-confident, ambitious, worldly, act as a leader, assertive, analytical, strong, sexual, knowledgeable, physical, successful good in mathematics and science, and the reverse of the feminine characteristics listed below.

Women (Femininity) – emotional, sensitive, expressive, aware of others’ feelings, tactful, gentle, security-oriented, quiet, nurturing, tender, cooperative, interested in pleasing others, interdependent, sympathetic, helpful, warm, interested in personal appearance and beauty in general, intuitive, focused on home and family, sexual good in art and literature and the reverse of the masculine characteristics above.

In the context of the research, a combination of the prominent masculine and feminine behaviours¹⁶ are what determine the individual to be an androgyne. The individual does, or can, express some, but not all, characteristics chosen from each sex. Naturally this can be perplexing, and at first glance an

¹⁶ Although these are listed as stereotypical behavioural characteristics of masculinity and femininity, a display of these characteristic does not determine one’s sex. I have not chosen to discuss the anatomy or presence of genitalia, as this is not the focus of my research, rather it focuses on the behaviour.

encounter with an androgyne may be confusing for someone conditioned by societal norms of believing in a gender binary.

In nature, examples of true hermaphrodites include species of snails and some fish¹⁷. In botany, many, but not all plants are hermaphrodites. Those that can sexually reproduce on their own have the presence of carpels, which produce ovules (female), and a stamen, which produces pollen (male); during sexual reproduction, the fertilised ovules become seeds¹⁸. Mentioned earlier, the Greek minor deity Hermaphroditus possessed a female figure with male genitalia. This deity can be interpreted as an early representation of bisexuality and effeminacy. The two terms androgyny and hermaphrodite are constantly seen together because they also share a similar scholarly predecessor seen in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD), his interest in the young androgynous deity is expressed:

“...bodies that had joined
no longer two but one – although biform:
one could have called that shape a woman
or a boy: for it seemed neither and seemed both.”

— Ovid (4.375-379)

¹⁷ Hamlet fish are *simultaneous hermaphrodites* (or *synchronous hermaphrodites*): They have both male and female sexual organs at the same time as an adult

¹⁸ This is a very basic explanation of flower morphology, as this research does not focus on botany.



Figure 1 - Yin and Yang symbol

Chinese Taoist philosophy and semiotics best expresses androgyny through the Yin and Yang symbol. With its circular shape, and sides divided between dark (Yin) and light (Yang), it represents one being or entity embodying all opposites; the principles of balance are achieved between the two sides, and dualities are further supported internally. In Robin R. Wang's research on Yin Yang theory, she describes each side as having a "deep appreciation... [for the other's] otherness". Wang describes this philosophy as being free of hierarchy; the harmony between the sides does not "necessitate superiority or inferiority," but carries a "genuine respect" for one another (Wang R., *Dong Zhongshu's Transformation of "Yin-Yang" Theory and Contesting of Gender Identity*, pp 225). Wang describes these as only ideals and concepts – they can exist metaphysically, but within the context of reality and nature, it is difficult to be fully achieved. Yin and yang are not "fixed categories, but together form a transformative dynamic process, as embodied in a complex and interactive relationship" (Wang, pp 226). In the context of androgyny, this counterbalance of behaviour, mutual respect, and self-inquiry are some of the essential elements for Eliade's "primordial androgyne."

Further examples of androgynous deities can be seen in the ancient Eastern religious faiths of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Hindu gods and deities were hermaphrodites with androgynous qualities. For man and woman, the gods were transcendental over primitive human existence and experiences. In every sense, the gods lived on another plane, and I believe it is for this reason that it was an aim for humanity to try to break free of gender binaries and transcend to the level of the gods.

In his exhibition catalogue essay *Androgyny in Art*, Gail Gelburd describes the Hindu God Brahman as “the universe as a manifestation of a primary principle ‘where the gods, man, woman, and creation grew out of an androgynous unity’ (Gelburd, Gail, *Androgyny in Art*, pp 5). The incarnation of Buddhovista, or Guan Yin¹⁹ of the East Asian Buddhist faith,²⁰ “has the ability to manifest himself in both male and female bodies” (Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese History and Thought*, pp 285).

¹⁹ Guan Yin is masculine in appearance; he is sometimes seen as healthily stout with a moustache. However, his behaviours, in the context of Eastern Chinese Buddhism are associated with the feminine as Guan Yin is the personification of kindness, mercy, compassion, and love. Recent incarnations of the deity see Guan Yin with having physical attributes associated with both sexes, draped by Buddhist robes, serenely smiling at his/her worshippers. Some Chinese schools refer to Guan Yin as both sexes interchangeably.

²⁰ My primary focus stems from Eastern religious practices as it fits within the context of both my and Bess’ view and creative perspective on androgyny.



Figure 2 – *Seated Guan yin Bodhisattva* (c. 1390- 1450). Dry lacquer, gold, and paint, 54 x 31 x 23 inches. Courtesy of the Walters Art Museum

Within the realms of contemporary and popular media, 20th and 21st Century androgyny has manifested itself through an array of contributions. Film works such as Sally Potter’s adaption of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (1992) featured a young Tilda Swinton shifting between the male and female sex through various epochs. Japanese mangas²¹, *One Piece* and *Sailor Moon*, both feature an androgynous protagonist and antagonists. Andy Warhol used the physically androgynous fashion designer, socialite and HIV/AIDs activist Tina Chow, in a series of silkscreen portraits. Recent issues of the American publication *Candy*²² have featured at least three covers in the last year with

²¹ Manga – a style of Japanese comic books and graphic novels, typically aimed at adults as well as children (Oxford Dictionary 7th Edition, Oxford University Press, 2005).

²² *Candy* is an American publication that champions “transversive style” and has previously featured American film actors James Franco and Jared Leto in cross-dressing personas, respectively.

androgynous figures, including one transsexual model, Connie Fleming²³ dressed as the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama.



(L-R) Figure 3 & 4 Andy Warhol, Tina Chow, silkscreen. Andy Warhol, Tina Chow, Polaroid.



Figure 5 - *The Candydate*, featuring transgender model Connie Darling. Photograph courtesy of Danielle Levitt. Courtesy of *Candy*, Winter 2012, Luis Venegas, New York.

²³ Connie Fleming is an American model and nightlife personality; she identifies as transgender. Fleming is described as “a living doll.” She is also a veteran of the Paris and New York runways (most notably for Thierry Mugler,) the Tokyo club performance scene, and many important New York nightclub cults, from The House of Field and Boy Bar to her work as a Mistress of Ceremonies at Jackie 60. She is currently the runway couch for emerging models at Donald Trump’s Trump Model Management.

Within the research, it was surprising to discover the presence of only one art exhibition that has retrospectively viewed androgyny's presence in the history of art; *Androgyny in Art* exhibited at the Emily Lowe Gallery at Hofstra University, in New York in 1982.



Figure 6 - Two film stills featuring actress Tilda Swinton as the male Orlando (left) and female Orlando (right), in Sally Potter's 1992 film. Courtesy Sony Pictures Classics

In Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1992)²⁴, Scottish actress Tilda Swinton stars as the titular character of Woolf's 1928 novel. Orlando is an androgynous male who travels through time and space, changing his physical sex through mere thought, after experiencing a *male* sexual identity crisis. This crisis is followed by a *female* sexual identity crisis. The protagonist shifts between the sexes, as he or she grows frustrated and cannot conform to what is expected of him or her. In this sensual portrait, Potter's *Orlando* is a suspension of belief; it treads between gender boundaries, but more importantly, the protagonist must find harmony and balance between what is present, and what can be discovered through self-reflection. Judith Halberstam critiques the film in her work *Female*

²⁴ For an in depth interview, view Sally Potter's interview with Bomb Magazine during the rerelease of the film in 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWv5R6hqYww>

Masculinities, describes Swinton's Orlando "as hardly butch in his masculine form; the perfect androgyne...[she] captures to perfection an in-between-ness of gender, which again looks like the eradication of gender than its staging" (Halberstam, Judith, *Female Masculinity*, pp 213). Halberstam continues to question the queerness of Orlando - is it merely a case of cross-dressing androgyny for Swinton and filmmaker Potter? The title character, as Halberstam describes, "can be read more comfortably as a boy...than a man (Halberstam, pp 213). She describes how Potter uses the lush scenery, rich costumes and gender-changing roles²⁵ to present androgyny as a woman in drag. Potter avoids the potential to take advantage of the queer sexuality that occurs in the film, having no queer sexual undertones until a more conventional male hero appears.



Figure 7 - Mr. 2 Kurei or Benthem featured in two costumes. On the left is a still from the animated series. The black and white image features Benthem's costume in *Operation: Meet Baroque Work* (2005). Illustrations courtesy of Ejichio Oda

²⁵ Quentin Crisp (1908 - 1999) was English writer and actor. He portrayed the role of Queen Elizabeth in Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1992).

One Piece (ワンピース) is a series of adult manga comics written and illustrated by Eiichiro Oda. Created in 1997, the popular adventure and pirate-themed manga tells a tale of treasure hunting, pirate lore, and fantasy. Featuring nautical motifs, music and colourful characters; it borrows and makes reference to moral tales taken from mythology. In 1999, it was made into an animated series with its primary demographic aimed toward children. The significance and contribution of *One Piece* in the realm of contemporary androgyny can be seen in Oda's inclusion of the antagonist Mr. 2 Kurei or his alias Benthem. Benthem is tall, lithe and dons a costume resembling Elizabethan pantaloons, with swan heads flanked as shoulder pads. His back is draped with a floor-length pink cape. On his feet, he wears en-pointe ballerina slippers. Benthem's face is covered in makeup, and could seemingly be mistaken as a hirsute female. Flamboyant, proud, selfless and loyal are just some of qualities associated with Benthem's character. As a ship captain, he constantly refers to his philosophy as the "*Okama Way*." The first stanza of the song (translated in English):

*In this world, there is only a man and a woman. However an okama is a man and a woman.
That's why it's the strongest (strongest)
Okama Way!*

Okama can be translated from Japanese as the "gay way" or the "transvestite way." When spoken or sung, the Japanese word *okama*, in a literal translation, resembling in English *come my way*. In a cross-language homonym, *okama way* serves as a double-entendre. Benthem sings this song with positive lyrics to bring pride and loyalty to his crew during their maritime adventure,

while also describing his ability to switch genders with ease with the use and consumption of *Devil Fruit*²⁶. The presence of such an object suggests how gender perhaps is oscillatory and relies merely on a magical fruit; it forces the research questions to ask if the gender binary is only a small section in a diverse spectrum of sexualities. His two names, Kurei, and Benthem, are a reference to his dual-sex. Oda's inclusion of this character and lyric is created for a Japanese audience, who would understand the dual meaning; as Benthem is only one example of many transsexual characters in Japanese manga²⁷.

In 1982, Emily Lowe Gallery at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York, organized the exhibition *Androgyny in Art*²⁸. The group exhibition featured 64 works, ranging from antiquity, 19th and 20th century and contemporary art; including Man Ray, Edvard Munch, Eleanor Antin, Lucas Samaras, and Hannah Wilke. Curated by gallery director Gail Gelburd, the exhibition catalogue provides a condensed historical context for androgynous art and thought, making reference to mythology, religion, and the objectification of the androgyne. Gelburd's text discusses androgyny's evolution and cultural significance within the last 200 years. She describes how philosopher and writer August Comte (1798 - 1857) was the "representative of the attitudes of

²⁶ Devil Fruit – a mystical fruit featured in the manga *One Piece*. The individual who ingests the fruit is given various abilities. For the character of Benthem, he can change his sex at ease with the food.

²⁷ Japanese manga *Sailor Moon* features a cross-gender/dressing protagonist named Sailor Uranus. In her everyday life, she dresses in men's clothes, identifies as male, and is in a relationship with a woman. When transformed into Sailor Uranus, the character wears a mini skirt; ankle boots, and uses a large Arabesque sword.

²⁸ *Androgyny in Art*. Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra University, Hempstead New York. Exhibition dates: November 6 – December 19, 1982.

the early and mid-nineteenth century” toward androgyny (Gelburd, pp 5).

Comte believed that the androgynous figure was a “grand being” (Gelburd, pp 5), and saw humans similar to Adam Kadman²⁹, of the Judeo-Kabbalist faith, before he was divided into the two sexes. Gelburd later described that contemporaries of Comte believed that this perspective on androgyny symbolised confidence in the future, as the androgyne represented perfection, unity, and continuity. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, social views experienced a shift in perspective in terms of androgyny. Led by French writer and occult philosopher, Josephine Peladan (1858 - 1918)³⁰, he described the “androgyne as the object of cerebral desires” (Fletcher, Ian, *Romantic Mythologies*, pp 44). With his many followers, androgyny once again evolved from revered deity to a cross of femme fatale, virgin and sexually liberated hermaphrodite. The exhibition shifts, with the prominence of art works expressing carnal desires rather than the initial interest in serenity and balance. This is made visible in the works of Pablo Picasso’s (1881 – 1973) *Minotaur en Femme*, 1933, a study of his fantasies with the exotic, bestiality, and disjointed figures. Aubrey Beardsley’s (1872 – 1898) illustrations of Salome revealed the titular character as a hermaphrodite. Painter Fernand Knopff’s interest in androgyny was expressed in his continued studies of the sphinx, and the myth of Oedipus. In these works, Knopff

²⁹ Adam Kadman is a phrase in the religious writings of Kabbalah meaning “original man.” Kabbalah is a collection of esoteric teachings that are integral to the Judaic religion and faith.

³⁰ Josephine Peladan (1858 - 1918) was a French novelist, and pseudo art occultist. He established the Salon de la Rose et Croix for painters, writers, and musicians sharing his artistic ideals. His work greatly promoted and influenced the Symbolists in particular.

appropriated the androgyne as a representative for his obsession with his sister. A dramatic shift from androgyny's primordial origins, the concept was in regression, objectified by the artists' wanton desires.³¹

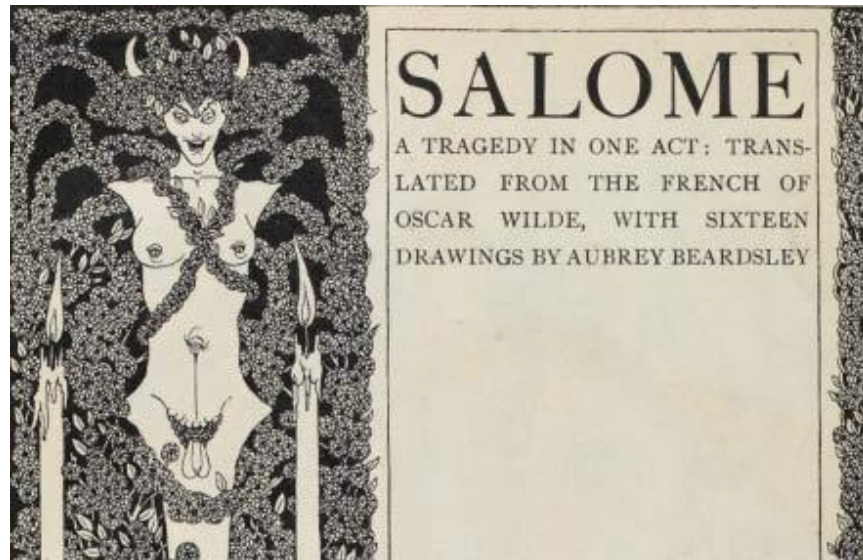


Figure 8 - Cover and detail for *Salome, a tragedy in one act* by Oscar Wilde; published by John Lane, The Bodley Head, London, 1907; illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley

The latter part of *Androgyny in Art* featured Surrealist and contemporary perspectives of androgyny. The Surrealists believed in revitalizing Eliade's "primordial androgyne," and celebrated the concept as a means to "resolve duality of the sexes and [celebrate] love" (Gelburd pp 7). It was, in theory, a solution of uniting patriarchal and matriarchal thoughts of the past. As the exhibition moved toward contemporary artworks (c. 1980s), perceptions of the androgynous featured in the exhibition mimicked certain aspects of previous periods, most notably the Sphinx and Oedipus myths. Seen in Figure 9, the myth

³¹ Similarly, the hijara people are revered as living deities, however, in the context to contemporary India, many of the hijara sustain themselves financially as prostitutes. They are desired and used as sex-machines, but feared for their supposed mystical connection to the spiritual world. More research will be discussed in the Chapter 2 regarding Kenneth Chau's visual practice.

of two characters – the Sphinx a hybrid of a woman’s head, lion’s body, eagle wings, and serpent’s tale, challenges a physically handsome Oedipus with her riddle: "What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening?"³² If he cannot answer the question she will tear him into pieces. In the works, the two characters seem both enraptured and at ease with one another. Challenging one another with their sexuality, cunning, and intellect, the juxtaposition of the two perhaps suggesting they were equals.



Figure 9 – Detail from Moreau, Gustave, *Oedipus and the Sphinx*, 1864. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

However, late twentieth century androgyny focused more on the “*tension* of the polarities, examining the dualities within each individual”, rather than exploiting a specific being or personification. The research of this tension was focused on how each artist or human has the ability to shift within him or herself. Whether it was between lightness or darkness, masculinity and femininity, decadence and austerity, lust or abstinence; featured contemporary artists, such as Eleanor Antin, Lucas Samaras, and Hannah Wilke, were just

³² The correct answer is a human being.

some of examples of the growing interest in a constant duality expressed in a visual medium.

As this was a rare subject matter, the exhibition was not largely publicized, visited or viewed. It does, however, provide an important commentary on social perceptions of the concept of androgyny in the late 20th century. As the term has been redefined throughout the centuries, it has survived great social changes, and with that, the creative practice of each artist featured mirrors those perceptions. Whether androgyny is defined to reflect the individual's physical desires, psychological state, socio-political views, or longing to become an 'other worldly' being, it is a concept that represents in every sense, duality. Androgyny is malleable, yet ephemeral, surreal and real. The parallels are endless. These are only a few examples of how androgyny has been interpreted in contemporary media. As we move forward, the next section will focus on the scholarly criticism of the androgyny.

1.3 Androgyny in Context

Androgyny is a difficult concept to categorise. It does not fall under the normative gender binary and it does not have a clear and distinct choice or chosen path. When viewing an androgyne, a number of questions come to light - the most prominent being "is the person in drag?" Our judgements are solely based on appearances, and although there is nothing wrong with these first impressions, the problem lies in where we place the androgyne, or does it even

matter? As this thesis focuses on examining how, if, and when aspects of androgyny aided Chau, Wilson, and Bess in attaining a higher state of existence when producing their works, then it is safe to say we must find some sort of contextualisation, methodology, or guideline in understanding their works.

As mentioned earlier, historically, the origins of androgyny came from the ancient Greek myth where a demigod and water nymph's body were fused together after a proclamation of love; the Buddhist religion has Guan Yin, a male/female mixture that defies human existence, and exists on an alternate plane. When presenting this research to a predominantly Chinese community, it was easily understood when the research presented the words homosexual and heterosexual. However, when terms such as hermaphrodite or androgyny were used, the parties present were largely confused. A new term describing both, can be translated as *middle sex*, and that is what Guan Yin is, a middle sex deity. Although as malleable as androgyny is, where does it fall under the spectrum of sexual orientation? According to Judith Halberstam, queer and lesbian scholarship suggest androgynes side more on the queer end of the spectrum, as the performative elements include dress, gesture, passing etc., all fundamentals of drag. Halberstam's seminal work *Female Masculinity* questions how the enormous number of sexual identities is constructed. If "masculinity [is] constructed as masculinity... [than] female masculinities" (including androgynes) are "framed as the rejected scraps of dominate masculinity (Halberstam, Judith, *Female Masculinity*, pp1). Then are there alternatives beyond masculinity and femininity? To continue the research on where the

androgyny lays in on the gender binary, Halberstam uses a description on gender variables by Martha Vicinus³³, an American scholar who is noted for drawing attention to double standards defined by the heterosexual male, to bring some clarity to the issue:

The androgyny, accordingly, represents a different form of gender variance than the masculine woman, and although the androgyny may have effaced some kind of opprobrium³⁴ it probably did not come in the form of a response to gender confusion. The androgyny represents some version of gender mixing, but it rarely adds up total ambiguity: when a woman is mistaken consistently for a man, I think it is safe to say that what marks her gender presentation is not androgyny but masculinity. (Halberstam, pp 57)

As mentioned, Vicinus' scholarly views focus on the double standards produced by predominantly white masculine men, but what about the flâneur or dandy? In many areas of discourse, including philosophy, feminism, cinema and the history of art, we often freely use the suggestion and argument of the male gaze as some kind of primal antagonist. What we see with our eyes, and construct with our minds narrates and labels the individual in front of us.

³³ Martha Vicinus is an American scholar of English and Women's studies. She has written several books on Victorian Women, as well as Gender and Human Sexuality.

³⁴ Opprobrium is defined as a harsh criticism or censure (Oxford Dictionary 7th Edition, Oxford University Press, 2005).

Earlier in Section 1.2, Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1992) was briefly discussed. The titular character's gaze switches between the genders, facing different societal viewpoints of men and woman, depending on which epoch he/she belonged to. But the gaze Orlando uses is anything but a predator's gaze. Halberstam calls this "Hollywood Androgyny" where "maleness and femaleness are in complete accord (Halberstam, pp 215). In contrast, the Japanese film *Gohatto* (1999) directed by Nagasi Oshima provides an alternate gaze.



Figure 10 - Kano, played by Japanese Actor Ryuhei Matsuda in a scene from *Gohatto* (1999)

It follows the lives of samurai in late 19th century Japan where one particularly androgynous samurai of a privileged background seduces the rest of his contemporaries, creating a confusing web of sexual encounters and lies all masked under the guise of his beauty and the tradition of the samurai. The title

translates to the English word 'taboo', which sets the tone. The story is a homosexual drama and it contrasts the secret rituals of the samurai, with a storyline similar to a daytime soap opera. The main character suggestively denies one officer but accepts another, making this film confusing, contrived and predictable. The scenery and musical score are lush and androgynous actors are beautiful, but the performances come off as wooden caricatures. The film's use of gay stereotypes and the supposed 'shock ending' is farcical and ridiculous. Oshima has the film broken up with ominous quotes about gossip, truth, and true love; one commander even has a collection of asides and soliloquies. The main character and viewer are insulted by the assumption his beauty has allowed him to access not only the samurai academy but also to all of their beds.

Both *Orlando*, in his male form, and Kano from *Gohatto* could perhaps be considered flâneur – a literary figure originated from 19th century France that describes a young man of leisure³⁵. They were of a particular privileged social background and connoisseurs of the various pleasures of life. Flâneur were mostly, well mannered, and were portrayed as aloof and highly self-aware. In the context of the research, when the flâneur was critiqued by Walter Benjamin (1892 – 1940) it became an important symbol and topic in academic scholarship. Benjamin drew reference from friend and poet Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 1867). Baudelaire was fond of the notion, while Benjamin felt that they

³⁵ Flâneur refer to strolling and walking with a particular gait in their step. Synonyms include saunter, lounge, layer, and in English a Dandy.

were merely a part of cultural capitalism at its highest. Baudelaire featured flâneur characters in his poetry and in an essay depicting him in a positive light as an intellectual-artistic figure. This description from Baudelaire's *Painter in Modern Life and Other Essays* (1893) describes in prose the eccentric lifestyle the flâneur led:

"The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world - impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define.... Thus the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy. Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life."³⁶

Christine Buci-Glucksmann's book entitled *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* is a critical exploration of conditions of modernity, including melancholy and nostalgia. She describes in a chapter entitled *Baudelarian Space* the nature of Benjamin's critique of Baudelaire's fondness for both the flâneur and androgyne. Buci-Glucksmann describes how Baudelaire wished to "see everything with this securing eye of the city dweller, of the flâneur who is prey to the heaped proliferation of images" (Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, pp 75). Perhaps, according to Buci-

³⁶ Baudelaire, C and Mayne, J. (1964). *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. [London]: Phaidon, p.6.

Glucksmann, the flâneur represented the modern androgyne to both Benjamin and Baudelaire. On one side of the spectrum, Baudelaire celebrates the flâneur's beauty without reason, while the other was practical and felt it was merely a case of 19th century popular-culture. Buci-Glucksmann discusses in her chapter how Baudelaire became interested in the "analogy between the status of art without aura and that of woman as commercialised sex object (Buci-Glucksmann, pp 79). This led to Baudelaire confronting and reactivating these certain 'great motifs' including that of the androgyne. Baudelaire's androgyne, as Benjamin describes is a heroine, but could never truly understand the notion of female homosexuality.

In conclusion, it seems that the debate within these areas of discourse are largely focused on where the androgyne lies on the gender spectrum in an attempt to rationalise a binary or to normalise it. Although there is profound respect of the work done by queer and feminist scholars for finding labels and articulating terms for any subgroup of people, the process itself seemed counterproductive, when it came to celebrating the differences and adhering to a higher state of spiritual understanding. Perhaps these areas of discourse were not appropriate to define androgyny, and instead belonged in the context of spirituality.

In *Tendencies*, an essay by Eve Sedgwick, she candidly describes how "uncomfortable [she is] generalising about people... [and in her work] to keep faith in vividly [remembering] promises made to ourselves in childhood. Promises to make invisible possibilities and desires visible' to make the tacit things explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be

smuggled...to challenge queer eradicating impulses frontally where they are to be so challenged" (Sedgwick, Eve, *Tendencies*, pp 3). In the context of the research, and in respect to Sedgwick's perspective, this implication was more associated with androgyny, rather than categories. Sedgwick's discourse perfectly articulates the qualities of androgyny that make it "absorbing imaginative, artistic, [and] intellectual" (Sedgwick, pp 20); this element of queer theory succinctly encapsulates one of the major aims of this thesis.

In conclusion, and in the context of the research, these few examples in varying areas of discourse show only how vast and specific the right contextualisation was in order to produce an appropriate perspective.

As this chapter deals with my own practice, I will be writing this section in the first person.

Chapter 2: Kenneth Chau

“Performed-Androgyny is defined by an individual who uses various means of communication including gestures, costume and language, in order to inhabit the role of an androgyne. An androgyne is an individual who exhibits either exterior or similar physical secondary sexual characteristics from both accepted genders. These individuals rely on these behaviours for the duration of their performance. Performed-androgyny must not be confused with androgyny per se, as this the former term was created to describe a series of traits and behaviours used during performative or performance based work.”

— Kenneth Chau, 2015

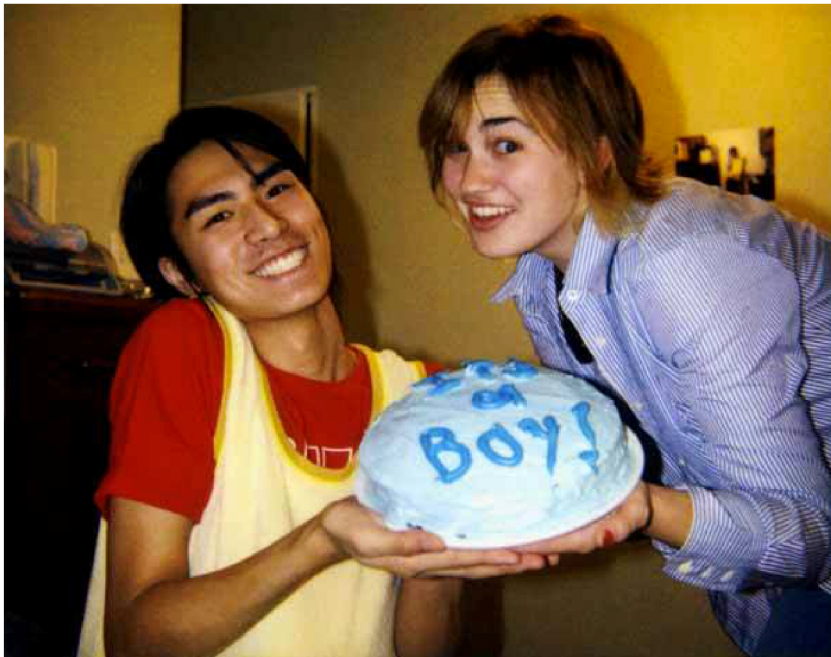
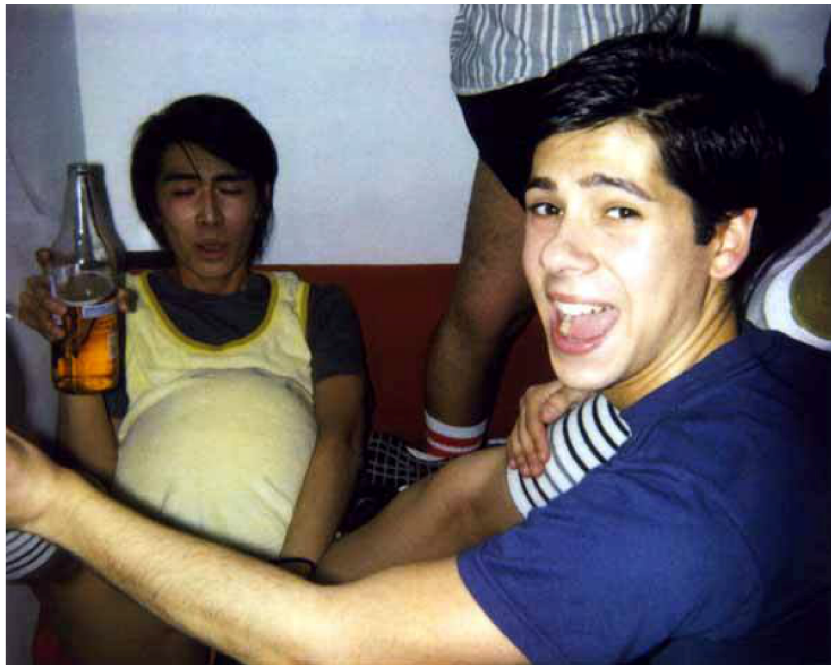
2.1 Background: Previous Works and Beginnings of *restraint & hijara*

Prior to developing my research for this current body of work, my body of photographic and performance-based works explored the themes of duality and identity in constructed environments through a variety of self-portraits. Seen in Figure 11, Figure 12 and Figure 13, two from the series entitled *Pregnancy*, 2005 and *Luna Regnum: Chapter IV, Homage: Family Portrait*, 2007, are examples of bodies of work that explore the mentioned themes. In *Pregnancy*, I engaged with the topic of carrying a child, even though I am

physically male. In a suspension of disbelief, the other players involved wholeheartedly accept my new dual role as both mother and father. The work itself was an exploration of the juxtaposition of stereotypical male behaviours such as violence, profanity, excessive consumption and physical confrontation, whilst undertaking something innately female.

During the month-long performance, the character portrayed in *Pregnancy*³⁷ eventually goes into an intense labour whilst consuming alcohol at a party and chaos ensues. While at the party, the water breaks and the character realises he will have the child there. Figure 11 shows how a supporting friend aids in the labour pains, while the character holds a large bottle of beer. Throughout this self-portrait work, I was able to examine how perception plays a predominant role within my practice. From this body of work, I became innately interested in the concept of perception. What I chose to believe and portray would predominantly control the audience's perception – something similar I found I shared with Wilson while analysing our works. The method of audience interaction provided a precursor to my current research, as this will be discussed in this chapter in Section 2.2 which examines my engagements with the photographic assistants.

³⁷ *Pregnancy* is currently being revisited and is entitled *Pregnancy Redux*. Eleven years have passed, and the character is pregnant once again. He is on a quest to search and find his missing child from that chaotic night. All of the original members of the performance have agreed to return in some shape or form.



(Top to Bottom) Figure 11 Kenneth Chau, *Jesse's Aid*, Polaroid, 2005.
Figure 12 Kenneth Chau, *It's a Boy!* Polaroid, 2005. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 13 – Kenneth Chau, *Luna Regnum: Chapter 4, Homage, Family Portrait*, Inkjet print on canvas, 2007.40 x 50 inches. Courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 13 is a large ensemble self-portrait of six characters. Completed for my undergraduate work at Parsons School of Design, NY, the work, entitled *Luna Regnum: Chapter 4, Homage, Family Portrait*, 2007, was a study on family dynamics, invented cultures, costume, and an understanding of constructed melodrama and environments. Each of the characters in the work is representative of an invented matriarchal monarchy. The costumes and accessories for each character were a reflection of my own ethnic and cultural

background, or had some significance in my cultural upbringing³⁸.

Pre-production of *restraint & hijara* was first created after I wished to embark on a self-portrait study focused on one individual. My previous major bodies of works were focused on multiple self-portraits portraying different characters and required high production values for costumes, locations etc. *restraint* was to be a more austere, simple body of work. I was interested in stripping away specific layers including the number of people involved and the production of each photo shoot was kept to its simplest aspects. The performance was specifically focused on the individual, while the technical aspects were reliant on natural lit scenarios, and the use of the same lens, aperture settings, the inclusion of a colour study³⁹ during each photographic session and only one study consisting of close ups⁴⁰. My interest with transsexuals originated from a high exposure to this subculture during my undergraduate studies in New York City. These individuals lived dual-lives and sometimes would appear to exist exclusively at night. The eclectic and nocturnal characters I had faced on a day-

³⁸ I was born in New York, and raised in Vancouver, Canada but have spent much of my life traveling abroad. I considered this body of work itself to play *Homage* to the places that I have been exposed to, as well as a personal reflection or mirroring of the menagerie of cultures that made up my upbringing.

³⁹ Including a colour study provided an alternate perspective of the landscape. This gave insight into the particular aesthetic of the series. The colour studies featured in the portfolio section are all muted and desaturated in tone, allowing the sequencing of the narrative to move without interruption. I felt an inclusion of at least one colour study would be beneficial in postproduction, since a majority of *restraint* was produced in black and white.

⁴⁰ Due to my previous career working in fashion photography and as a model, I felt it was necessary for this project to be almost void of close-ups, as I wanted the imagery to evoke androgyny through the landscape and sensibilities presented through the work, rather than my own physical androgyny.

to-day basis influenced my initial research on dualities, binaries, and parallels. From a personal anecdote, in 2004 I was approached by a drag-performer who was convinced that I was a character by the name of *Feathers*⁴¹, only re-incarnated. I had insisted this was impossible but that first experience aided me in my initial analysis that even within a subculture so marginalized reincarnation existed. As I saw this individual more often, the more convinced he was of my reincarnated status. He shared details including how Feathers and I had very similar bone structure, body shape and height, and mannerisms. In reality, I had absolutely no idea who he was referring to, and it was merely coincidental that I had somehow manifested this nightlife persona.

Like my previous bodies of works, all my photographic studies had been focused on self-reflections and self-inquiry; the thematic qualities and processes that carried over from the previous bodies of work to this one were the constructed environment, technical fluency in the material and camera work, and the use of self-portraiture as a means of expressing something greater and beyond an image of the artist. By definition, self-portrait *is a portrait study of an artist produced or created by the same artist*. By definition, this format of portrait study provides an opportunity to bring greater insight into the subject, and this self-reflective process is specific to my methodology. I believe that applying the self-portrait to *restraint* was critical in my investigation of androgyny. As mentioned in previous chapters, the research on androgyny led

⁴¹ I had later consulted the self proclaimed 'most famous transsexual in the world' Amanda Lepore if she could confirm these details for me regarding Feathers whereabouts and physical and behavioural similarities to me.

me toward believing it is a higher state of mind. From this perspective, it was essential to use myself to hypothesize whether or not it was possible to reach this place. Although I considered directing another individual or finding a model for this body of work, in the end, self-portraiture outweighed the possibilities for this specific body of research.



(Top to Bottom) Figure 14 - *restraint & hijara: rock study*, 2010. Courtesy of the Artist.
Figure 15 - *restraint and hijara: jungle study*, 2010. Courtesy of the Artist



Figure 16 - *restraint & hijara: ribbon study*, 2010. Courtesy of the Artist

2.2 Methodology: The Subject

Production began in Hong Kong April 2010. *restraint & hijara* is an ongoing photographic self-portrait project that explores ideas and aspects of androgyny and its related behaviours. As mentioned in previous chapters, this thesis applies specific threads of androgyny in order to provide an appropriate context. From the perspective of the thesis, my research has lead me to believe that androgyny is more aligned with spirituality and perception, or rather a higher state of mind.

The work in this series is multidisciplinary. It is firstly photographic, and secondly performative. It consists of several self-portrait studies in various

landscapes and chronicles the activity of an unnamed character. For the purposes of this chapter, I will call this person *the subject*, and use the pronoun *he* in order to avoid any confusion between the photographer and the person within the photograph. This particular subject is significant because the process of drawing out his performative characteristics differs from previous bodies of work. The methodology attached to this body of work is a self-reflective one; whereas previous works were short-term performative pieces, the subject in *restraint* required nurturing, understanding, and mutual respect. During the production of each photo shoot, an ongoing dialogue occurs between the two halves, both as performer and photographer. There are multiple conversations occurring at the same time: the photographer and subject, the photographer and assistant, and the subject with the landscape. This methodology and dialogue is then expressed and exhibited through the photographic work. The series is presented in both single images and multiple contact sheets.

Primarily, the subject is seen traveling through various landscapes, including mountainous regions, beaches, coastlines, and forests. Depending on the geography of each location, the subject is seen wearing a variety of long robes, often floor length, and in addition he is wearing a pleated kilt or skirt. They are primarily natural colours, and the fibres consist of cottons or heavier wools. This is specifically done to reflect each external landscape. Most importantly, the subject is wearing a facial restraint on his head, which is consistently seen in almost every portrait study.

The garments used in *restraint & hijara*, including the facial restraint, are primarily Japanese in origin, and were collected specifically for use in the

series⁴². An ongoing theme present in *restraint & hijara* is the balance of parallels. These parallels must be narrated and dictated in a specific way in order to function. The performance is carried out with specific steps, including the ritualistic donning of the costumes in a specific order, the process to which I adhere in order to get into character, and the communication shared between the three parties present: myself, the subject, and the assistant.

restraint & hijara predominantly explores *the subject's* reality. He is something that I cannot be in reality, a nomadic and ethereal wanderer who travels across realms, and displays transient behaviours toward his surroundings. The performance qualities expressed by myself in both pre-production and production are documented through photography. Androgyny is reflected in *the subject's* body language, gestures, and interactions with each landscape; it is the interaction between practices that informs my research and methodologies; it is an ongoing dialogue between the theoretical and hypothetical interaction that is led by studio practice. It is not the viewer's reality, as we do not see aspects of the audience's civilization in the photographs, but it is the subject's reality. When viewing the work, one must suspend one's disbelief⁴³ as we focus in on the subject's activities within each

⁴² These facial restraints were marketed primarily for women to wear during sleep. It resembles the same facemask a person must wear post-op during facial reconstruction or plastic/cosmetic surgery. I appropriated the use of this object by using it as a metaphor and symbol for the subject's primary physical restraint.

⁴³ Suspension of belief is defined, as the viewer/reader would agree to suspend judgment concerning the implausibility of the narrative. In the context of the research, *restraint & hijara* involves the on-going interaction between dualities between the artist and self.

episode. *The subject* constantly repeats specific gestures. Favourites include exposing the left shoulder, arching the back, covering the eyes with his wrist, and exhibiting his neck – a natural move during which the mouth would be slightly left ajar. He would repeat these specific moves constantly, and insist on not making eye contact for roughly a year into the research. These repeated gestures, discussed by scholar of performance art Jane Blocker, are an action that helps “move further into the body, rather than transcend it” (Blocker, Jane, *What the Body Costs?* pp 34). However, she later describes how these repeated gestures are truly showcasing or speaking the “language of [the specific body part]” (Blocker, pp 35). In the context of my practice and research, I would have to agree that in some, but not all the works, I am attempting to veer the attention away from the person in the image; I do make repeated gestures in an experiment to see if I shall receive a similar reaction. But if Blocker’s argument suggests that repetition does not transcend performance and in the context of the thesis, androgyny is a higher state of existence, then what should be done? Perhaps, how I interpret Blocker’s point of view is not applicable to my practice, as many of the works she analyses in her research and book, focus on performance-based pieces that demonstrate body mutilation, audience reaction, body fluids, and lover’s quarrels. It is an index of performance-based experiments that I have yet to experience.

To further elaborate, I conducted a series of interviews with my photographic assistants on the repeated gestures they witnessed throughout the documentation of *restraint & hijara*. Collectively, the four assistants came to

the conclusion that I was never performing for them, but they were merely watching the subject be himself.⁴⁴ Dee Chaneva, a Bulgarian photographer, who assisted me for over a year, went on to describe *restraint*'s subject as a reflection of "the environment...[as] you became a different being...[reflecting] the waves, rocks, the sky or snow, [you] became someone else" (See Appendix C).

What I was trying to further understand about *the subject* was not how he was an extension of myself at all, but how unrecognizable I felt when editing and observing the ongoing works. Whereas in previous bodies of works, I always saw the superficial reflection of myself within the portrait, *the subject* in *restraint & hijara* was not me at all. He lived in a constructed world where we were only allowed to see episodic activities during each study. In an experimental video piece, the camera recorded⁴⁵ as the subject came to terms with his environment. However, as the camera continued to record, the subject chose to stare directly into the camera. This reaction or gesture was not rehearsed, constructed or discussed beforehand. It felt in that moment that the subject was in control, and became his own living thing that would finally exist in his own right⁴⁶. In terms of the gestures and sexual connotations within

⁴⁴ See Appendix B-E for the full transcripts of the interviews.

⁴⁵ Although I had an assistant during this experiment, the composition of the frame and image were direct and straightforward. It did not require the assistant to make explicit choices. She was there merely to record and document the happenings of the performance-based work. See Appendix F for the film stills entitled *Experimental Video Piece*.

⁴⁶ After several years of performing as the subject in *restraint* and over 1000+ self-portraits, I, as the performer, never felt empowered to take control of the body of work as the photographer in me, had previously controlled everything.

some of the images, the sexuality alluded from the photograph was not the intention but rather the result. Evidence of his dominance came in my own desire to continue shooting with this subject, and simultaneously being able to perform as him. *restraint & hijara* is an intermediate study. It is an intermediate study because I play both roles as artist and subject, and intermediate because the resulting work is of a transient nature. It is about the interaction between the self, the landscape, and the presented self. These three critical elements converse with one another throughout every photographic session; *the subject* lives vicariously through the landscape, as I live vicariously through the subject. The creative practice as the primary methodology questioned which processes and thoughts examined the self the best. Subsequently, I experimented with non-verbal dialogue that occurred during the production process of making the series. Non-verbal communication is expressed through dress, gesture, or emotive responses. This aspect of control was ultimately driven by the instincts of the character seen in the image, not by the photographer. I examined the limits of that control, and whether or not the audience engagement with the work itself mattered on any level; it was also suggested that I practice auto-ethnography, however this process seemed inappropriate for the research as I was inventing my own world and mythology, rather than documenting my reality. I experimented with the notion of having a conversation with the alternate self, to illustrate the duality of my practice that occurred in reality. The methodology investigated in my dissertation is, in fact, this dialogue. In a creative experiment to help understand the dynamic shared between *the subject* and myself, I began to explore this idea through various short self-reflective

essays examining our relationship. The following is an excerpt⁴⁷ from one of them:

“Now this is how I always felt about this subject. We kept our literal distance, I had to think about the signals and signs that he was showing me, the values of the literal places and landscapes he was bringing me to, and I felt privileged that I was allowed to decipher these qualities and investigate these means of his expression. Since our primary means of communication was constructed through a medium, and was at its core, non-verbal, I had to rely on specific transitional cues. The photographs developed through very limited engagements, we didn't exactly have a production meeting, it moved instinctually based on what he wanted to do and the places he wanted to go.

As time passed and we have become closer and more intimate, and although I hadn't drawn a hypothesis or conclusion, I had to rationalize to some degree of his reasoning for keeping a distance. Whenever you meet someone new or make a new friend, the amount of layers and masks we have to break and project to one another before a seemingly bonding event, and the amount of time it takes before it shifts towards a more intimate world, is frankly exhausting. But diligently, we continued to work together. He liked to show me trees, caves, and the transitional cues were in these locations, beaches, rocky landscapes, and these places were about the melding of two bodies together, and where elements could coexist, life forms could be there in one place, and the duality made this specific location special. I found this to be the only way this being could communicate with me. I understand that from the way he controlled things after all this time, and that this verbal conversation I so longed for was never going to happen.”

⁴⁷ This was originally read in a presentation at Research Methods in 2011, as well as in my lecture to Martha Wilson's graduate students at Pratt Institute in 2012.



Figure 17 - *restraint & hijara: clover study*, 2010. Courtesy of the Artist.

The title of the work is derived from the definitions of restraint: to hold back from action; keep in check or under control; repress (Oxford English Dictionary, 7th Edition). The title speaks for itself: restraint can be described as a limitation, internal or external, while hijara is a specific subculture of Indian transsexuals that translates from Hindi as non-woman. Prevailing from Ancient India, the hijara's lives are in transience. Today, they still co-exist with contemporary society, while practising ancient but fleeting rituals that fall within boundaries of witchcraft or sorcery. This subculture of transsexual is significant because of their inclusion of having had once, before imperialism, social and legal representation in the governing of ancient India.

2.3 Hijara

The initial research on hijara began primarily as a source of inspiration for a development of a new series and character. The hijara people are seen as living deities and the paradox of being in a contemporary society is that they cannot financially support themselves as demigods. Many of them are used as

sex slaves as they fall in between the binary of male and female, and are poverty stricken and often abused. They are used in wedding ceremonies, funerary processions, and dance for money; if a hijara exposes their genitalia to you it is considered a very bad omen. In context to my research, I am merely using an aspect of the word to describe how androgyny can co-exist in our world and am expressing it in a constructed visual medium. This is by no means a documentary or historical research thesis focused on their lifestyle, or sociology of these people. Upon closer inspection, I discovered the deep-rooted ideas of this group were living examples of androgyny. Having already believed that androgyny is a higher state of mind; I had embarked on searching for living examples or groups of people that lived in this way. Discussed in Section 1.1 on the background of androgyny, I found that within Eastern philosophy and religion, an array of characters existed who were either male, female, both, or beyond gender. The hijara in particular have felt internally to be both male and female and on the exterior of the Indian race. An elder hijara, who trains a younger hijara, will ask their disciple if they wish to carry out a brutal ritual of removing one's genitalia. The ritual consists of various chanting to goddesses by other existing transsexuals⁴⁸, and with two swift cuts of a sharp knife, the elder removes the genitalia and the male is immediately reborn female. When this ritual is complete, the newly formed female dons a bride's costume and dips her feet in red liquid and smears her forehead with the same substance, similar to that of a Christian baptism. Although there are many examples of third-

⁴⁸ In this context, the word transsexual is used to describe an individual who has already undergone sexual reassignment surgery.

gendered peoples around the world, what drew me to particularly focus on the hijara were the inclusion of post-menopausal woman as one of their own. Hijara divide themselves into four categories, including a male born with underdeveloped genitalia, a male with un-descended testicles, an individual with both sets of sexual organs, - a true hermaphrodite, and a postmenopausal woman⁴⁹ (Reddy, Gayatri, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijara Identity in South India*, 2005). A woman in late-middle age, who no longer ovulates, can make the conscious decision to refer to herself as a hijara. This living example was the context I needed to develop my research on creating a character that was consciously androgynous⁵⁰.



Figure 18 – *Portrait of a Hijara woman*, 1995. Photograph courtesy of Takeshi Ishikawa

⁴⁹ From the hijara's point of view, post-menopausal women do not have the capacity to reproduce, therefore cannot be characterised as fully women.

⁵⁰ I took a great interest in this subculture while researching a context for dealing with the idea of androgyny before entering the program. I looked to Japanese photographer Takeshi Ishikawa, who documents his time with them in his book entitled *Hijras: the Third Gender of India* (See Figure 18).

2.4 Format

Producing *restraint & hijara*, resulted in over 1000 self-portraits. For the portfolio aspect, the photographs are presented in single-portraits, diptychs, and enlarged contact sheets. The enlarged contact sheet format was chosen as it presented an opportunity to express the subject's movement and relationship to each landscape. More importantly, the contact sheets provided evidence that *restraint* was an interdisciplinary project of equal parts photographic and performance based results. The cinematic or temporal aspect of the contact sheets showed the narrative of *restraint*, and presented a parallel to the episodic single images. With the enlarged contact sheet, the viewer is able to see the transitions between each frame, as well as a full composition of every gesture featured during the photographic shoot.

Every photographic work in the series was shot in medium-format, and includes both black and white and colour film using a Hasselblad 501CM. There is one experimental infrared film study, and a short experimental film study as well. Each study is titled in the following format: *restraint & hijara: (Landscape or Quality) Study, (Date)*.

2.5 Performed-Androgyny

The definition of the original term *performed-androgyny* was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. As I have presented in the sections of this chapter, performed-androgyny is essential to my methodology for this body of work; it defines the process and without it, the work could not exist. In Section

3.3 performed-androgyny is further elaborated on with Martha Wilson, as we both share an interest in the term and its practice.

2.6 Reactions

restraint & hijara differed from previous interdisciplinary photographic and performance-based studies, in that it was a long-term work and was not performed live. The response from my previous bodies of work was also largely different as *restraint* was subjected to heavier criticism both by my artistic contemporaries, and colleagues - it was always noted for being aesthetically pleasing and beautiful but lacked a certain depth or substance and was considered shallow. The work was criticised as being narcissistic and producing elements that were beyond my intellectual understanding of the subject matter. The completed photographs for the submitted thesis have been praised for their style and composition, however it was suggested that my interest in androgyny was merely based on superficiality and only the physically androgynous. Perhaps it was due to my previous background working in the fashion industry, and the awareness I had in how I carried my body, mannerisms, etc. relative to space and social settings. Or perhaps it was that the explanations and definitions I had used did not articulate what was expected in preconceived definitions of androgyny. Social values and markets for physically androgynous people⁵¹ influence the way in which we form our

⁵¹ See Section 1.2 on background of androgyny, and how it is currently used as financial commodity in the world of fashion and other industries

judgments; it is understandable how one could prejudge aspects of self-portraiture of a former model as being narcissistic. However, my intention could only be the antithesis of this criticism as my thesis intended to investigate how androgyny was a place in which one could reach a higher state of mind; the physicality of the subject and aesthetics of the completed were merely results. Androgyny acts as a form of transgression for understanding human behaviour and gender, and also the parallels that run throughout each social epoch.

"I'm making myself as ugly as possible, and it makes me feel better that I don't look like this all the time."

— Martha Wilson, 1974

3.1 Background

Supported by a wry creative sense of humour and a courageous candour, Feminist performance and conceptual artist Martha Wilson (1947-) addresses the common fears of the inevitable ageing process, social perception, and presentation by and for others. By questioning the rigorous demands of beauty, she has self-examined her identity in a career that has spanned over 40 years. These investigations, which are primarily expressed in a series of self-portrait studies, are brought to life using a mixture of performance, photography, video, and text. By addressing her own identity crisis, growth, female archetypes, and marginal figures of society, Wilson creates a dialogue that makes us question the shared anxieties and sensibilities we all experience at some point while under social scrutiny and observation.

Born to Quaker parents in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Wilson is predominantly known as the founder of New York based avant-garde exhibition space Franklin Furnace Archive⁵². Founded in April 1976, Franklin Furnace Archive was a leading figure in pioneering the importance of having a safe place

⁵² Franklin Furnace Archive's intention is to make the world safe for avant-garde art. It was founded to "serve artists who choose publishing as a democratic artistic medium and who were not being supported by existing artistic organizations."

for performance art to be nurtured and exhibited to a greater audience⁵³. The organisation's intention was to create an art space that fostered and archived, temporal-based artwork. The artist-run foundation, which first began in Wilson's own loft, functioned as an exhibition salon, bookstore, and creative centre for performance art. Unlike foundations and collectives today created with the advent of sophisticated technology, internet, and social media, Franklin Furnace Archive's primary mission was and still is "to present, preserve, interpret, proselytize and advocate on behalf of avant-garde art, especially forms that may be vulnerable due to institutional neglect, their ephemeral nature, or politically unpopular content."

In her artistic practice, Wilson can be described as a conceptualist. This can be defined as an artist whose ideas take precedence over the aesthetic demands of the work itself. As Wilson has made reference to in several interviews and texts, her strong interest in conceptual work was largely influenced by conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner's description in his *Declaration of Intent* (1968). Weiner defines idea-based work as such:

1. The artist may construct the piece.
2. The piece may be fabricated.
3. The piece need not be built.

Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.

⁵³ In February 1997, the organisation closed its physical space, but re-emerged as a web-space. The Internet could reach a broader audience for emerging artists - the primary focus and driving force behind to Wilson's intention. Franklin Furnace Archive currently sponsors performance and temporal arts with a yearly grant.

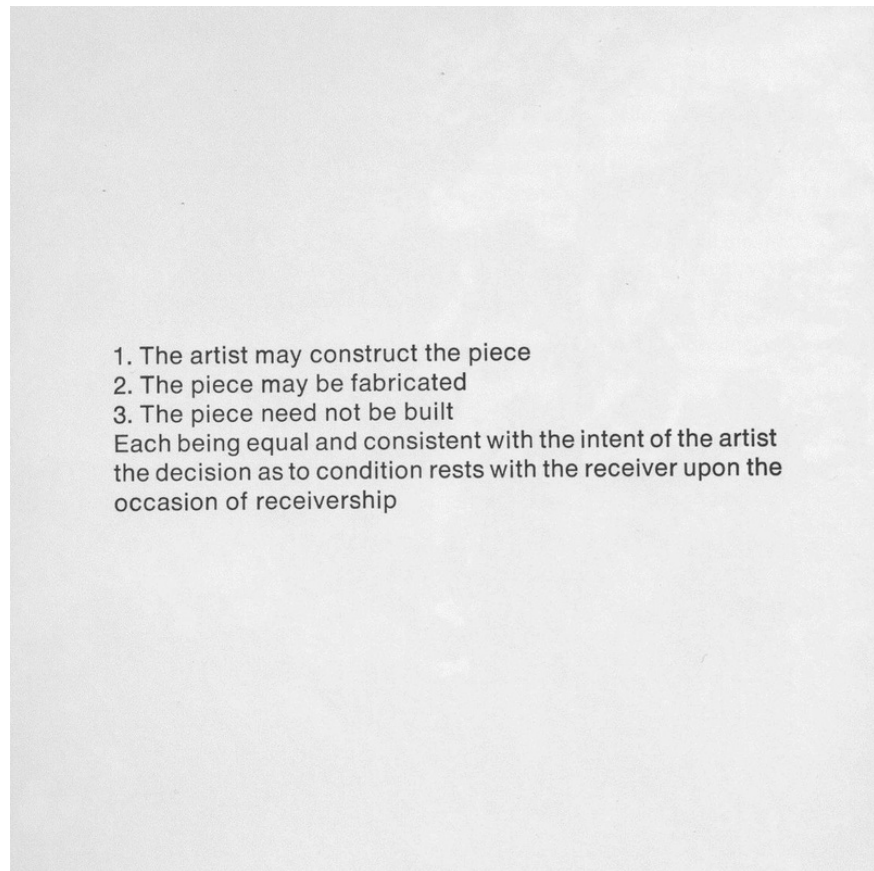


Figure 19 - Lawrence Weiner, *An Accumulation of Information from Here to There* (1969), exhibited in "Software: Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art," Curated by Jack Burnham at the Jewish Museum in 1970

This is not to say that Wilson disregards the image or visualisation of the artwork, as her interdisciplinary practice is constantly revisiting aspects of the performed self, her physical-real self, the feminist aesthetic, and her own identity; sometimes involving the audience to actively participate and engage with her. In her work, the audience is translated as both a live audience interaction, or in reference to the self-absorbed audience - two aspects that can be regarded as Wilson's influence on my own practice.

Developing her early methodology in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Wilson and her boyfriend at the time made the conscious decision to move to the Atlantic and almost subarctic Canadian city both for pragmatic and social reasons.

Having left the United States at the height of the Vietnam War in 1969, living in Canada meant her partner could avoid military drafting, while both could receive significant funding for their respective post-graduate educations. In the early 1970s, after Wilson's attempt to pursue a PhD in English Literature at Dalhousie University in Halifax was rejected, the artist began a job teaching English grammar to art students at neighbouring institution, the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design. This period gave Wilson career changing and influential encounters with visiting artists such as Sol LeWitt (1928 – 2007), Joseph Beuys (1912 – 1986), who expressed the importance of Weiner's statement on conceptual art, and Vito Acconci. Acconci was a key figure in introducing Wilson to the significant sociological text *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1954) by Erving Goffmann, a text concerning the subtle non-verbal gestural cues we seemingly perform to one another throughout any given social context. Being in Halifax also brought on the chance encounter Wilson had with visiting lecturer and curator Lucy R. Lippard. Meeting Lippard functioned not only as a great influence on Wilson's artistic development, after aiding Wilson in defining her photographic and performance works as "actually artwork." Curator, Lippard included the artist in her 1974 all- female exhibition *c. 7500*⁵⁴, in Valencia, California, and was integral in placing then 27 year old

⁵⁴ *c. 7500* was a landmark exhibition organized by feminist critic and curator Lucy R. Lippard. Opening approximately for almost one week from the 14th to 18th of May 1973 and first presented at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California, the exhibition was fourth and last in a series of loosely connected conceptual art collections. The title of the exhibition was reflective of the population of each respective city. The three previous exhibitions were *557 087*, held in Seattle, Washington, 1969; *955 000*, in Vancouver, British Columbia, 1970; *2 972 453*, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1971. *c. 7500* differed from the previous three exhibitions as it included exclusively the works of twenty-six female conceptual artists. Lippard was adamant on featuring many unknown female figures, including a very young Martha Wilson in her first major group exhibition.

Wilson, who was confined to her secluded Canadian landscape, into the feminist discourse and conversations seen in academic circles and communities in California, New York, and parts of Europe. The dynamic exhibition, which was fourth in a series, was comprised of 26 female artists, including the work of Laurie Anderson, Jacki Apple, and Eleanor Antin. Each artist had been asked to reinterpret the index card for this exhibition and each designed and created both sides of the work, featuring some form of text or image describing their concept. In the catalogue, Lippard includes Wilson under the category of artists "dealing with transformation, primarily of the self" with Wilson's index card featuring on one side *Breast Forms Permutated* (1972) a humorous and clinical study of the search for the 'perfect set of breasts' in a series of 9 pairs of varying shapes such as conical-full, pendulous-full or spherical, while the other side explained *Breasts*, as well as included a description of Wilson's performance work *Alchemy* (1973) documenting in text a period where the artist "chemically transformed her hair into three varieties of gold." These two themes, varying bodily forms and the physical changes that we as humans have the ability to control, would prove to be continued aspects of Wilson's practice in later work. As art historian Jayne Wark describes in her 2001 study of the artist entitled *Martha Wilson: Not Taking it at Face Value* from the journal *Camera Obscura*, Wilson's performance works and questions of identity are in direct correspondence with the "broad impetus of the 1970s feminist art [movement]....[created to] shake loose as the imposed gender roles and restrictions upon women in patriarchy." In *Face Value*, Wark questions if the historical visibility, relevance and inclusion of Wilson in the feminist

conversation of the 1970s was largely driven by Lippard's inclusion of Wilson c. 7500 and her essay *From the Centre: Feminist Essay on Women's Art* (1976) as it is the primary work revisited in her career by critics and audiences alike. Wilson was invisible before her chance encounter with Lippard, unbeknownst to herself that she was creating works to be considered art.



Figure 20 - Martha Wilson, *Breast Forms Permutated*, 1972, black and white photograph, text, 20 x 14 inches. Courtesy of P. P. O. W., New York

Some portions of this section 3.2 and 3.3 are in first person as they describe personal anecdotal experiences with Wilson.

3.2 Wilson's Foreign Emotions and the Correspondence



Figure 21 - Martha Wilson, *Posturing Drag* 1972. Photographs with texts 19 x 11 inches. Courtesy of P.P.O.W, New York.

During my tenure at online auction-house, Paddle8⁵⁵, I was given the opportunity to research and write a blog-post⁵⁶ on Martha Wilson. By the time my tenure came to an end, I began a correspondence with her regarding my interest in one of her performance pieces. Between August and September

⁵⁵ Paddle8 is an online art auction house based in New York where I was a Contributing Editor for the United Kingdom.

⁵⁶ To view the full blog post use the following link
[Paddle8 Blog: Spotlight - Bomb Magazine and Martha Wilson](#)

2012, Wilson and I began a month long correspondence before we decided to meet⁵⁷.



Figure 22 – The former members of *Disband* reunite 40 years later to perform.
Photograph courtesy of Sarah Jenkins

Initially, Wilson explained the reason she was interested in performance-based work was because it allowed her to experience new and “foreign emotions.”

These foreign emotions were based on, for example, a reaction to a traumatic event, or perhaps creating an unfamiliar character in order to experience life from their perspective. Wilson’s performance-based works range from the staging of a dual-drag piece of a woman trying to pass as a man who dresses as a woman, performing as former Presidents and First Ladies of the United States at live events, or attempting to come to terms with her fears of age and time, or merely experimenting with our dependency on or advocacy of modern technology. As Moira Roth implies in *The Amazing Decade: Woman and Performance Art 1970 – 1980*, Wilson’s dualistic works express her willingness

⁵⁷ Wilson had graciously invited me to her graduate class at Pratt Institute, New York to give a lecture on my practice.

to explore fantasy and truth, with the “merging of the realised and [the] idealised self (Roth, pp 148).” The performances can be brief and documented through video, or occasionally long-term live works that require audience interaction, costumes, and more complex setups. The ‘foreign emotions’ forced Wilson to ask herself “whom experimental me was?” Whether or not this new “me” was, for example, “a gay man dressed up as a woman” (See Figure 21) in the work entitled *Posturing Drag* (1972/1996), where Wilson is physically a woman trying to pass as a man who is cross-dressing as a woman; with her punk rock group *Disband*⁵⁸ or simply experimenting with her facial features in the works entitled *I make up the image of my perfection/ I make up the image of my deformity* (1974).

“After [performance artist, Richards Jarden] left me, I had to find out *whom experimental me*...To go into foreign places [helps you] find out that's in here (points to her heart), so I had to go out there to reflect who was in here. And it consisted and continues because when I impersonate Barbara Bush for example, it's very liberating to be someone who is objectionable, hateful, and incorrigible *temporarily*. I get to go home and take the wig off, and Barbara is gone. But I was able to travel to Barbara-fiction for a period of time”

— Martha Wilson, 2012

⁵⁸ With Frank Furnace Archive, Wilson has created a platform for many other performance artists to present their works. Some of Wilson's own work is collaborative, such as her defunct punk rock band *Disband*. *Disband* was an all female collaborative and performance group based in New York active between the years 1978 – 1982. The members included Wilson and three other performance artists, Donna Hennes, Ingrid Sichy, and Ilona Granet, respectively. They employed the use of non-instrumental elements in their performance, as they did not see themselves as musicians, and for example playing sounds from a plastic bag and in a cappella. Currently disbanded, the former musical group intended of having the youthful innocence of an all-girl band, while keeping the energy of a punk band. *Disband* was popular amongst art and feminist circles alike. (See Figure 22).

In a chapter entitled *Mimicry and Repetition* from *The Analysis of Performance Art*, performance artist and author Anthony Howell says ‘experimental mes’ as Wilson refers to them, are a collection of repeated layers created in order to “alter, camouflage, or enlarge us...everything we learn...[it] comes from outside ourselves” (Howell, *The Analysis of Performance Art* pp 31). As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, Wilson’s interest in performance-based work was strongly influenced by an encounter with Vito Acconci⁵⁹. This meeting resulted in Acconci introducing her to the text *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1954) by sociologist, Erving Goffman. To summarise the text, Goffman’s *Presentation* used the backdrop of theatre to expose the importance of human day-to-day social interactions. With the metaphor of the theatre, Goffman describes the backstage (internal) to the onstage (external) performances we produce for one another. The book describes how human lives require an audience – whether or not that audience begins with your reflection in the mirror in the morning, work colleagues, family members, or strangers. Our performances are further perceived as passing or more believable when indicated through the use of costume, particular gestures, specific location or time of day. How we perceive ourselves can perhaps override how we present ourselves. These elements described a methodology for performance that, when applied by Wilson in her creative works questioning

⁵⁹ Acconci was then working on *SeedBed* (1972) a performance piece that required Acconci to lie beneath a ramp for roughly three weeks. In the piece, he masturbated eight hours a day, and would be seen murmuring things such as “You’re pushing your cunt down on my mouth” or “You’re ramming your cock down into my ass.” In his 1972 review of the work, art critic, Jerry Saltz describes the *Seedbed* and Acconci as the “producer and the receiver of the work’s pleasure. He is simultaneously public and private, making marks yet leaving little behind, and

self-identity, gender, and the projection of a specific identity, could help her understand these foreign emotions.

In 1972, Wilson stated "Individuals play at being themselves in order to realize themselves...all human beings are performing...fictive or real, at all times...This means for the concept of "self" is that the self does not exist as anything but a dramatic effect. The self [that] others deal with is the image we project into a scene." This perhaps led me to understanding how her performances reached a grey-area of understanding the male and female. In an excerpt from our conversation⁶⁰ in September 2012, she described to me her initial encounters with androgyny in the 1970s:

Kenneth Chau: ...you felt androgynous. There was a grant you applied for and the only reason they didn't accept you was because you wanted to remove your breasts?

Martha Wilson: Both of them! I wanted both of them removed to in order to have a [physically] male profile....[I was feeling jealous!]. Lena Ezano recognized [that] "Men have power, women don't" and one of her pieces was to decide to reject the society of women, which she did. Because women don't have power! I thought to myself, I really didn't look like a woman, I had straight hips, and I looked like a beanpole with some boobs, and I thought I could pass as a man...They did not give it to me because they knew I was going to do it.

Wilson explained how the Feminist Movement, Civil Rights, and the

demonstrating ultra-awareness of his viewer while being in a semi-trance state." For further reading, refer to Appendix A for the conversation I shared with Wilson.

⁶⁰ Full transcript of my interview with Martha Wilson is in Appendix A

This conversation is actually a 're-performance' from our original conversation that took place in New York. Due to technical difficulties, the first conversation was not recorded properly. Wilson agreed to re-perform what happened that day with me several months later

Vietnam War – three major moments in the last century that represented a great amount of change in a short period of time, ran concurrently to her development as an artist. With that said, she discussed with me how in the 1970s men had more opportunity even for something as vague and obscure as performance art than women. It was this initial rejection that led her begin a *politically androgynous* approach. Political androgyny is defined as an individual who uses aspects of the male and female characteristics and behaviours when initially motivated by a politically driven conflict. Performance art in the 1970s was still predominantly male-oriented. Information was harder to come across, and communication was even more difficult. Of course, there were female performance artists at the time too including Carolee Schneeman (1939-), Yoko Ono (1933-), Yayoi Kusama (1929-), and Marina Abramovic (1946-). Prior to her participation in the exhibition *c. 7500* and meeting Lucy Lippard, young Martha Wilson's exposure to this form of art was limited to work by male artists. Before her awareness and interest to become a practitioner of performance-based work, her knowledge of famous contemporaries at the time included Vito Acconci (1940-), Bruce Nauman (1941-), Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), collaborative duo Gilbert & George (1943-, 1942-), and Chris Burden (1946-); all men.

3.3 Our Correspondence and the Initial Ideas of Performed-Androgyny

As our correspondence continued, Wilson and I shared ideas on our performance processes⁶¹ and, once again the word androgyny appeared. From her essay entitled *On Seeing the Invisible* (2004), Peggy Phelan divides performance art into three thematic categories:

- 1) Performance emerges from the history of theatre and begins as a counterpoint to realism
- 2) Performance emerges from the history of painting and gains its force and focus after Jackson Pollock's action painting
- 3) Performance represents a return to investigations of the body most fully explore by shamans, yogis, and practitioners of alternative healing arts.

Wilson's performance work was an area of interest as it seemingly documented an on-going dialogue in a self-reflective body of work. According to Phelan's thematic categories, Wilson's performance work fell under theme one; it was helping to produce in a positive manner, art works that aided in the social discourse of understanding oneself. Under the first theme, her oeuvre examines the boundaries of the artist's private, social, and political views; and is merged in these extensions or the 'foreign emotions and bodies' she portrays. Wilson stated that during our conversation, the term *performed-androgyny* was immediately of interest to her. In my research, the original term *performed-androgyny* is defined as an individual who uses various means of

⁶¹ Wilson had described to me how she likes to wear the wig or headpiece first in order to dress as that person. In my creative practice, during any preparation for a performance, I prefer to place the headpiece on last. This is done in order to differentiate to myself that I am dressing up as this character rather than vice versa.

communication including gestures, costume and language in order to inhabit the role of an androgyne. An androgyne is an individual who exhibits either exterior or similar physical secondary sexual characteristics from both accepted genders. These individuals rely on these behaviours for the duration of their performance. Performed-androgyny must not be confused with androgyny *per se*, as the former term was created to describe a series of traits and behaviours used during performative or performance based work. This individual has consciously applied male and female behaviours or characteristics during a performance-based work in order to better express their vision; when stated or made obvious (through costume, gesture, makeup etc.) it allows the individual, and/or the audience to understand the form, the method, intention, and/or reason for which the androgyny is presented. In an excerpt from our conversation originally taking place in September 2012, she described to me her interest in *performed-androgyny*:

Kenneth Chau: I think that's something about performing as someone else or, as I have brought up in *performed-androgyny*. It is about having the ability and being aware of that androgyny, and placing it into a social context.

Martha Wilson: Yes, with performed-androgyny? I think it's important to keep the word performed in front of androgyny because it places a time with it, whereas androgyny is static. Performed-androgyny means you are purposely dressing yourself up to be a woman or whatever. So it's a more detailed description about the process and less about the result.

Although Wilson's performance and photographic work was created during a completely different social and historical context than my own, we seemingly

share an interest in emotional limitations within each performance-based work (Further research of my own practice examined in Section 3.1). Like Goffman's *Presentation*, Wilson is interested in what she describes as "feedback" which is characterised as how the audience either a group, individual, or one's reflection responds to those actions. In her 1974 performance piece *Psychology of Camera Presence*, Wilson begins by stating, "My watching myself now on the video monitor symbolizes this state of split awareness. My objective in this piece is to disappear psychologically, to be aware only of my absence, not my awareness of my awareness." She continues by explaining how she will achieve this by moving her body in a repetitive rocking motion back and forth until she disappears from the frame of the screen.

Her body of work, though performed and created by a female, could perhaps be re-performed by a man. It seemed it could be genderless, or perhaps androgynous in the sense that it took on qualities that fit into both gender norms. The similarities in our methods were profoundly influential on my own performance-based work. Unlike Bess, whose understanding of androgyny was influenced, and perhaps misguided, by his obsession to become a pseudo-deity, Wilson's encounter with androgyny show how, as a result, the concept can be transient, positive, and malleable.

Chapter 4: Forrest Bess

4.1 Background

"I can close my eyes in a dark room and if there is no outside noise or attraction, plus, if there is no conscious effort on my part — then I can see color, lines, patterns, and forms that make up my canvases. I have always copied these arrangements without elaboration."

— Forrest Bess

Forrest Bess (1911 – 1977) was an American painter. Born in Bay City, Texas, a small fishing community, most of his life was spent working as a fishing bait salesman. At the age of 66, he died from complications caused by skin cancer in a Bay City nursing home. Bess' artwork has recently received a resurgence of interest. Posthumously, in the fall of 2013, Bess' artwork received a small retrospective at the Menil Centre in Houston, Texas, entitled *Seeing Things Invisible*; the release of Chuck Smith's book entitled *The Key to the Riddle*, a ten year follow up to the original film of the same title, and was included in the 2012 Whitney Biennial. The Menil Centre's show travelled throughout the United States, first exhibiting at the Hammer Museum in Purchase New York, taking place from September 29, 2013 – January 5, 2014; this was followed by an exhibition at the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, New York taking place February 16 – May 18, 2014.



Figure 23 - Forrest Bess, *Seascape with Sun*. Oil on canvas, 1947. 14 x 16 inches.
Courtesy of Houston Museum of Fine Arts.

During his lifetime, Bess' work was represented at the Betty Parson's Gallery in New York, from 1946 - 1967 where he received six solo exhibitions, including a mid-career retrospective in 1962. At the time, the gallery significantly contributed toward the American Modernist style⁶², as some argue, Parsons helped coin the term *abstract expressionism*. Betty Parsons included Bess amongst her roster of artists, including Mark Rothko (1903 – 1970), Jackson Pollock (1911 – 1956), Ellsworth Kelly (1923-), and Robert Rauschenberg (1925 – 2008).

Most of Bess' life was spent in the Bay City area, although he was not isolated as he traveled frequently to New York during his exhibitions. He

⁶² Beginning in the early 20th century, American Modernism is characterized a moment or style that aims to depart significantly from classical and traditional forms.

preferred to remain a recluse while in Texas, selling fishing bait during the day, and holding all night painting sessions in the evening. Bess was a visionary painter. The majority of his works were small, included text or anecdotes written on the back; the canvases vividly coloured, full of strange, enigmatic aboriginal and archaic sexual symbols, and seemingly full of messages. His canvases provided insight and information on Bess' curiosity into the unconscious; they express a calm, almost accepted understanding of his place in world. Bess stated in 1962 that his "Paintings [were] tomorrow's paintings. Watch and see." Of the 100 works that remain out of Bess' oeuvre, the artist firmly believed that he had discovered the secret elements to immortality.

Immortality was his obsession. He was fanatical and determined in his research to find these alchemical secrets. Alchemy, the philosophical search for longevity, gold, and youth, originates from antiquity. In a 1951 Bay City newspaper piece, Bess describes himself as a "visionary" artist. It was "[something] seen otherwise than by ordinary sight" (Letter to Ernest Shapiro from Bess, 1948). Bess firmly believed that through his paintings he could discover these secrets. Although he chose to live a life of solitude, he was not considered an Outsider artist⁶³. Though he was physically outside the realms of the art world, his talent and knowledge of art were not accidental. His written dialogue with major figures shows he was social in his correspondences with

⁶³ The term Outsider Art can refer to a group of artists who engage in visual practice on the outside and boundaries of official culture. It can also mean they did not receive a formal art education. The former label is primarily geared toward child prodigies, artists with mental instabilities, with an unawareness of their abilities. In most cases, outsider artworks are found after the artist has died. Outsider art illustrates extreme mental states, unconventional ideas, or elaborate fantasy worlds.

figures in the art and medical community about his research on the hermaphrodite. Most notably, he compiled his own researched thesis on the hermaphrodite⁶⁴, which featured relevant articles, drawings, his ideas of the superhuman, and dreams. Unfortunately, no physical copy of this document exists as Bess had a tendency to rip out pages to share with his correspondents. In one of his many essays on Bess, Art critic and writer, John Yau described him as an “autodidact, a simple man, a visionary, an innocent, and a crank.”⁶⁵

Bess’ artistic contemporaries included Philip Guston (1913 – 1980), Jackson Pollock (1912 – 1956) and Alfred Jensen (1903 – 1981), however, because of the sexual nature of his symbolic studies and the difference in aesthetics, Bess is often marginalized as a figure in the abstract expressionism movement. Bess’ biography includes information regarding his obsession with the hermaphrodite and alchemy, manifesting itself in two surgical procedures on his genitalia. Buddhist scholar, Robert Thurman describes, in Chuck Smith’s 1998 film *Key to the Riddle*, that Bess’ interest in the hermaphrodite seemingly was rooted in Eastern religious philosophy. Bess believed that his research into these medical procedures would aid him in reaching enlightenment beyond gender binaries, and fulfill his goal of becoming a better artist.⁶⁶ In many

⁶⁴ No physical copy of Bess’s thesis exists. Only Professor Robert Thurman, a Buddhist and Eastern Religion scholar at Columbia University has seen a completely copy.

⁶⁵ John Yau wrote the catalogue essay from posthumous exhibition *Forrest Bess* at Hirsch and Adler Gallery, New York, 1988.

⁶⁶ Though his intention and hope was that the procedures would aid him in receiving enlightenment, it only produced false hope for Bess. Bess died in 1977 of skin cancer, when staying in a mental institute. Ironically, despite his quiet career as an exhibiting artist in New York, it was understood that no one at the hospital believed his second-career and life.

artistic reviews of his work, critics would often mention these procedures raising the question of whether they were an act of discrimination or a marketing tool, and would question if Bess' vocal point of view were part of a greater message. Having clarification and an understanding of Bess' state of mind and viewpoints provides context and perhaps aids in our understanding of his visual practice. Further analysis of this mentioned medical report and concurrent surgical procedures is seen in Section 4.2

In a 1976 issue of the Journal of Sex Research, entitled *Three Cases of Genital Self-Surgery and Their Relationship to Transsexualism*⁶⁷, Dr. John Money describes Bess' case and self-inflicted surgical procedures. To summarize, Dr. Money describes Bess as obsessed with urethral eroticism – an artist who was “confused and disorganized” who strung together a scrapbook with clippings, drawings, and letters from various major figures in the fields of psychiatry, sexology, and ethnography. Bess supposedly drew his evidence from “mythology, art history, iconography, literature, Jungian mysticism, Goethe, the Bible and personal experience.”⁶⁸ The report states that Bess claimed to have done enough medical research on his own to have the knowledge to self-operate, but had sought Dr. Money for an additional procedure, and as someone to help publicize the procedure internationally.

This obsessive nature of his self-inflicted surgical procedures had potentially catalyzed Bess' mental state. Toward at the end of his life, he was

⁶⁷ I must acknowledge and thank filmmaker Chuck Smith for sharing this report with me.

⁶⁸ Money is describing Bess' *Untitled incomplete androgyny thesis*, which Bess sent him a copy.

institutionalized, and eventually died in Bay City, Texas. His search for alchemy was never validated.

4.2 Bess' Surgeries

Bess' research and visual practice was dedicated to the search for a visual code, a narrative or information pertaining to the symbols that he had hoped would later relay a message of alchemical⁶⁹ wisdom from beyond this world. His aesthetic and process were simple – described in long standing correspondences, he only painted at night, and created small canvases that depicted his desires, dreams, and visions. The letters reveal a curious man, focused on finding answers that could only be examined through his visual research.

By the late 1940s, Forrest Bess' personal conflicts were beginning to be reflected in his work. In a 1948 letter to Betty Parsons, he described how his personality had “two distinct parts” the first being “practical-sensible-aggressive” ...while the second was “artistic sensitive-introspective⁷⁰.” Through Bess' interest in Aboriginal Australian tribes, he had obsessively read about their rituals of scrotum-altering procedures as part of gaining access to a “key”. The procedures of the aborigines are vague, but generally

⁶⁹ Alchemy is defined as a “medieval form of chemistry, the chief aim of which was to discover how to turn ordinary metals into gold” (Oxford English Dictionary 7th Edition, pp 18). For Bess he felt that the “alchemy” was to find out how to become immortal.

⁷⁰ I have interpreted this as conflicting feelings Bess had for his sexuality identity.

consisted of a division of the underside of the penis from the glans to the scrotum. As a result, the male would not be able to impregnate a woman, and he would be forced to squat to pee rather than stand; in a sense, the primary trait of physical masculinity is thus removed. For Bess this was fascinating, as he felt a procedure like this would somehow give him the ability to become both male and female; from his perspective, this procedure allowed him to inhabit his views on immortality. Bess believed he had uncovered the secret to immortality and the answer was – the hermaphrodite; a hermaphrodite being the “desired and intended state of man” (Smith, pp 66). During this period, Bess began to research the work of psychologist Carl Jung, and associated his views on the aborigines similar to those of Jung’s, who had earlier claimed that aborigines understood the language of symbols. Bess may have misunderstood Jung’s interest in androgyny as it pertains to human consciousness and that there are both masculine and feminine aspects to the functioning psyche. Perhaps this is where his motivation and mission to achieve a higher state of mind and reach enlightenment went awry. From Bess’ perspective, the androgynous symbols he took an interest in depicted a melding of the two minds; it did not reflect upon the physical body whatsoever. Even before Bess carried out his first surgical procedure, he had begun constructing what he would describe as his “thesis”. The work consisted of written texts, and a large collection of images, x-rays, paintings, newspaper clippings, and articles which helped support his theory that hermaphroditism was the key to immortality.

In 1952, Bess had performed two self-inflicted procedures. In a state of euphoria, fear, and confusion, Bess did not follow through with the same aborigine ritual, and was left with hypospadias. Hypospadias is typically seen as a birth defect in which the male urethra is not present at the glans of the penis (the tip), but in the scrotum (the bottom) (See Figure 24).

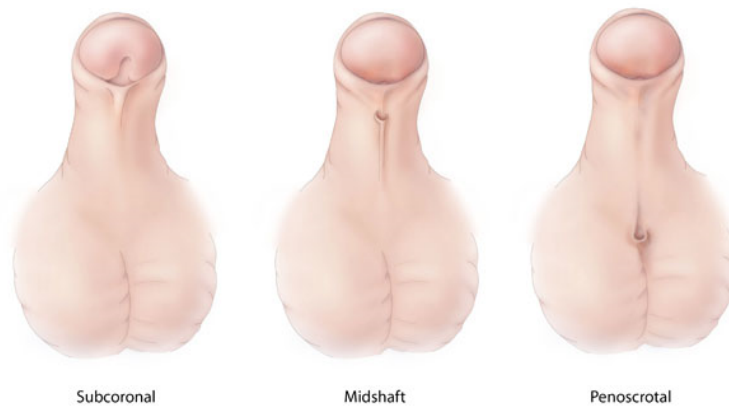


Figure 24 - Three different kinds of hypospadias. Image courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, USA.

However, even after the procedure caused him incredible physical pain, Bess still genuinely believed that this was the answer to his ongoing riddle. In the full transcript from a 1952 letter, an enthralled Bess describes his new discovery to scholar Meyer Shapiro on the catalyst of his newfound research:

Dear Meyer,

Jung says that there are others (not a few) who find themselves in our position – that is of designing completeness – with a belief that somehow it means greater freedom – possibly complete freedom. Jung states that it is highly dangerous for the individual to attempt to go the way alone – that it would be impossible practically. I might ask: what is the individual to do, when through his work, his symbols he has painted, he has stimulated himself to the point that he must go the way?

I feel that I can speak a little more freely with you now. For a long time after my mutilation I felt that there was absolutely no reasoning behind the two incisions that I had made. I felt that I had “gone mad” yet the power behind the parable was terrific. I knew what I was doing – I had no anaesthesia, did not think of using it- but got myself good and drunk. In other words, what I am trying to do here is to make rational my acts. Without the incision in the glans penis, no further research could have been made. I possibly should take a bit of time here and explain the second incision in the perineum.

I knew that the Virgin was covered with a veil with dark spots on it. I was afraid of the scrotum, so I looked at the perineum – there was the door! As I said, I got myself good and drunk and began the thing. Just my father and I were here and I was very much afraid – I carried the radio to my room and turned it low, sort of a precautionary step in case it would be too painful. Then I began – it was not too painful, but what surprised me was the layer of fat – here was the “forest” of the poet = the one in which many were lost! The great fear was cutting the upper part of the urethra, so I inserted a test tube to hold the skin away. I hacked away, scared as hell. A terrific cramp came in my side, the razor blade slipped from my hand and I was knocked on the floor. What had happened I don't know, except I was then knew these words – “This is the way that Christ died” the unconscious energies when flooded in and I went to the doctor who used metholate, and suggested I see a psychiatrist. But, Meyer, the unconscious flooded in beautifully – I had found entrance to the world within myself – a beautiful dimension that had very been talked about, and but not very clearly. The canvas at Betty's – “and all the things I have forgotten” = this was part of me I had discovered...



Figure 25 - Photograph of Bess' self-inflicted surgical procedure

As Bess rationalised his actions to Shapiro regarding his procedures, it can be seen in this letter how confused and tormented an individual he was. In his ongoing search to fully engage with his conflicting emotions, Bess felt this was the only appropriate action for his inner turmoil. In the letter, he describes the first and second incisions in detail, and how he justified his behaviour in order to understand his research. He does this by relating his pain to that of Christ and describes the procedures as cathartic and beyond his control. Bess' struggle with mental illness did receive some attention when Bess sought the help of both a doctor and a psychiatrist⁷¹ shortly after his procedure. When asked about his wounds, he claimed it was an accident with a fishhook, and was dispatched without any further medical attention. In his delusion, Bess felt that if the doctors could not see beyond his actions as self-mutilation, then there was no point to seeking their help. Bess was now a pseudo-hermaphrodite, and with this new self, he was able to continue the research he desperately wanted to explore.

⁷¹ Described in Chuck Smith's book *The Key to the Riddle*, Bess' interest in Jung was an obsession. When examined by the doctor he requested a Jungian psychiatrist, but the doctor heard 'young'. Instead Bess was given a young psychiatrist, who did not have any previous knowledge of Jung's work or theories.

CHART OF SYMBOLS

In a letter to Betty Parsons, Forrest Bess diagrammed the following symbols:









	to cut (like a sharp rock)		penis
	to cut deep	red =	male
	to cut shallow	white =	female
	to stretch		to contain
	to stretch (formalized)		to go north
	hole		trees
	hole gets bigger		hermaphrodite
	to stretch hole		death (undilated urethra)
	to go (make journey)		life (dilated urethra)
	back and forth (masturbation/coitus)		golden star (anus)
	marking of time (periods of time)		stones (testicles)
	craters		bulbocavernous muscle fiber
	waves	green =	young
	moisture	pale yellow =	light
	young woman	Indian yellow =	urine
	man	brown or tan =	excrement
	vulva		

Figure 26 - Dated the 4th of September 1962, in a letter to Betty Parsons, Bess shares his new discovery to his gallerist. Bess writes how these simple symbols “[differ] considerably from the accepted beliefs” Courtesy of the Smithsonian Archive of America.

4.3 Bess’ Symbols: Four Works

Through his research on aboriginal tribes, Bess compiled a list of symbols (Figure 26) that he shared with Betty Parsons. These primitive symbols were a code and language that Bess completed in order to explain some of his work. The symbols ranged from simple horizontal lines, meaning, “to go or make a journey”; Y shapes representing trees; to a thin triangle representing a deep cut; or an eye ball, to which Bess used to represent a vulva. The

symbols were used concurrently with his paintings, and as viewers, we can apply these in order to understand the message and values Bess perhaps was hoping to convey in his work. The application of this graph helps decipher some of the enigmatic messages Bess produces.

This section will focus on three works and a series of letters by Bess categorised in the following order: the first painting representing works created during his period of research into the aborigines; the second was completed after the operation; the third from a series of letters he produced entitled the *Ballet*; the fourth representing his last work after his second procedure. By looking at these works within the time frame from 1950 – 1970, I wish to expose how Bess' mental state was hindered. His practice began with a dream or vision, which grew into an obsession, and had fully consumed his life toward the end. To validate my interpretation of his works, I have looked at Bess' personal letters⁷².

⁷² In a sequence of letters dated in 1950 to Meyer Shapiro, Bess writes him detailed descriptions of his day, followed by tales of hallucinations, and describes his homosexual feelings. Bess explains how the first was to share details of his enlistment in the army, but the second letter was brought on by sheer enthusiasm and excitement; he could not wait for Shapiro to respond before writing him another letter. Bess describes how a "majority of [his] canvases come from these visions – a form of cultivated seeing into the darkness and do not exist as the hallucinations which [he has] had." In fact, he had "obsessive hallucination[s]." Bess' inner conflict is exposed here. He confides in Shapiro about his "strong homosexual leanings" which have been "intentionally blocked." He concludes the letter by explaining, "by only breaking completely away from society can I arrive at a reasonable existence" (Bess, Forrest. *Private Letter to Meyer Shapiro*. 1950).

These documents help describe Bess' mental state. The letters expose Bess' insecurities, and perhaps shed some light on his understanding of a spiritual or intellectual *higher state of mind*.

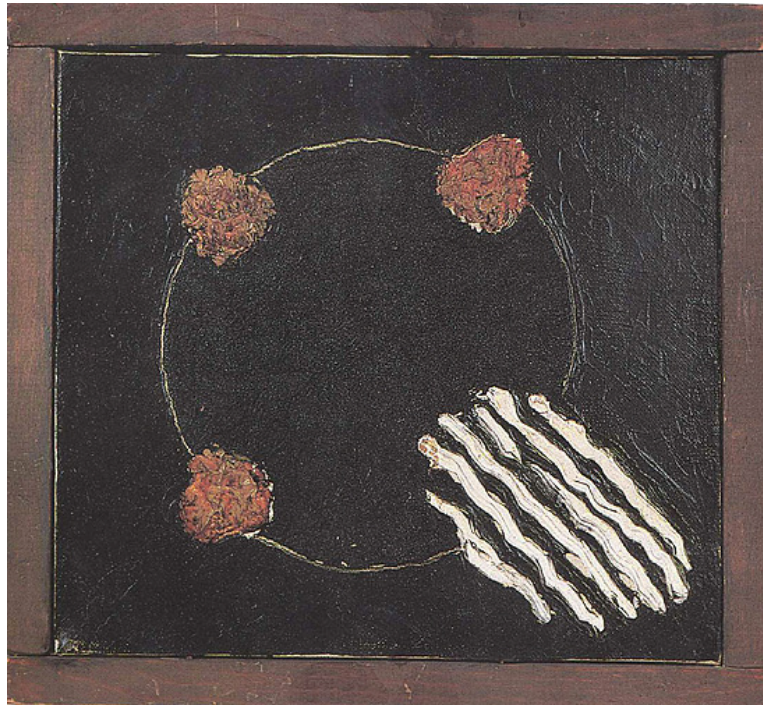


Figure 27 - Forrest Bess, *Untitled (No. 14)*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 9 x10 inches.
Collection of Edward R. Downe, Jr.

In *Untitled (No. 14)* (1951) we are presented with a small square shaped canvas. The background is black, and painted flat and roughly. On the canvas we see very simple figures. These include a thinly drawn orange or yellow hued circle, three odd shaped ovals red and brown in colour resembling raspberries, and six thin white lines, resembling worms. The four objects are placed in the direction of the North, South, East, and West, but tilted 45 degrees to the right. The raspberry-shaped objects seem to be moving outward from the centre of the circle, while the white lines seem to be penetrating inward.

On first inspection, the work itself manages to suggest sexual conception, the lines resemble sperm, the raspberry shapes resembling eggs, and the large circle resembling a cell. It is dark, and mysterious, uncomfortable, and yet childlike at the same time. With its small size of 9 by 10 inches, it would not make an immediate impression after a first encounter. When Bess' chart is applied to the work, not all the symbols are immediately decipherable. However, if we follow it, we can see that the white lines are meant to represent *penises*, the red of the oval shapes are representative of the *male sex*, and the yellow of the circle is representative of either *light or urine*. Taking into consideration these elements, and the date of the work, Bess would have already begun his research into aborigines and their rituals. Perhaps Bess meant to represent something literal in this work. The circle could represent a void, a conflict – a dream of removal? The ovals look as if they are fleeing, as the white penises are entering.



Figure 28 – Forrest Bess, *Before Man*, 1952-53. Oil on wood, 9.5 x 23 inches. Image courtesy of the collection of the Neuberger Museum, Purchase, New York.

In *Before Man* (1952-53), we are presented with one of Bess' largest works. It measures 9.5 inches in height and 23 inches in width. Not large at all by comparison to his contemporaries, but for Bess these small canvases fit into his process of night painting. The painting is horizontally divided in the centre. On the top half, the background is painted white, while the bottom half is painted black. Much like the other works, the chosen colour palette is limited – this time to black, white, and a few primary colours. Completed between pre-operation and post-operation, *Before Man* depicts eight figures resembling stick-men painted in an abstract landscape. Four mountainous regions emerge from the bottom. The figures are painted black, and based on the title seem to represent a man and woman. Their reflection is mirrored down the horizontal centre, where the figures shadow or possibly double is represented in white. The painting features two couples standing on the sides, while a group of four stand in the centre. Although they seem to have no obvious defining gender or sexual characteristics, the two exterior couples have one larger figure and one

smaller figure, and have their four limbs stretched out to their sides. The group of four in the centre are carrying a diamond shaped object painted in primary colours.

Nothing from Bess' chart of symbols explains his representation in *Before Man*. Although abstract, I read the painting as a tribe or social gathering. They are grouped together for a specific reason holding something precious to them. The white could be daylight, the black represents night with shadows from the moon or sun, doubles or twins; the parallels could be endless. What is true is that Bess was experiencing a major change in his life when he made this work. In a letter addressed to both Shapiro and his wife Lillian, dated March 14, 1953, Bess explains his new discovery following his "ability to look at the human body and the relationship of its various parts to each other in the light of the law of complimentary."

Before Man projects a poignant quality that seem to be missing from the other examples of his work. While the previous two pieces I described represented an outburst or perhaps violence, Bess' work here is calm, meditative, and exposed. I interpret this work as a family unit, however in the context of Bess' research, character and circumstance; it perhaps is a metaphor for the discovery of kin, a longing for a community of sorts. These antiquarian inhabitants of our earth are primitive looking – Bess was never a figurative painter, but their collectiveness is a universal activity. Bess' *Before Man* is androgynous in the sense that it brings in aspects of anything that is divided

between a binary. The work is transient and is reflective of the definition of androgyny.⁷³

Soon after his first procedure, Bess embarked on an endless search for immortality. He seemed to be desperate to share his thesis with almost anyone. Large amounts of letters, readings, clippings, and images were sent to Shapiro during 1953. It shows how enthusiastic Bess was post-op on his newfound discovery. Bess highly valued Meyer validate his actions be justified, and perhaps this is why he corresponded with scholars, writers, and intellectuals during his lifetime. Despite many of whom would never respond, he would continue to have a one-sided conversation, hoping through their answers he could manage to be seen, from his perspective, as their equals.

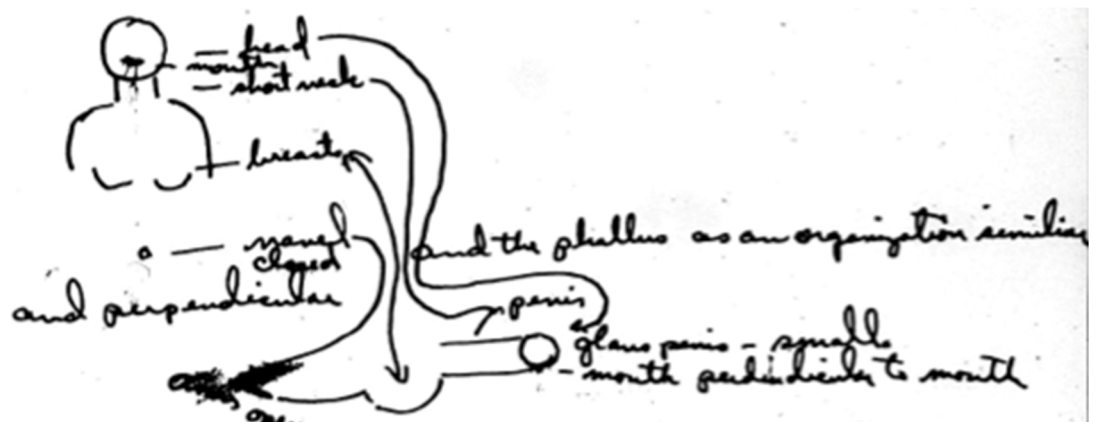


Figure 29 - A drawing from Bess' *Ballet*, Letter to Meyer Shapiro, March 14, 1953.
Image courtesy of the American Archives of Art at the Smithsonian Institute.

⁷³ The following is the section to which Bess' painting falls under this category of androgyny: *Androgyny* is defined as an individual that has both male and female characteristics; the individual appears to be neither strongly male nor female" (Oxford Dictionary 7th Edition, Oxford University Press, 2005). These characteristics, behaviours, and intentions are not clearly defined within the accepted forms of gender binary. Rather the individual has ability to perform these behaviours; they are in a sense in between of being consciously and unconsciously aware of the abilities, however it is not a born behaviour, it is learned practice. The individual is transient in applying these said abilities.

In the same group of letters dated March 14, 1953, Bess referred to them as his *Ballet*. The letters feature a drawing depicting a graph or diagram explaining how a phallus is complimentary to that of the human head. It explains their complimentary physical similarities, and seemed to hypothesize on the reasons for their existence. These letters consisted of his early “thesis” ideas and following the drawing he stated:

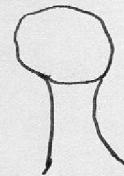
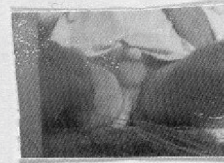
“...there is a complete transfer of senses from the upper part of the body to the pelvic region during sleep, according for the sensation upon awakening of rising or going up apparently from the underworld, or phallus. The Indians were aware that the phallus assumed a peculiar life of its own during the night as mentioned above. In all ways, the phallus area is complimentary to the upper part of the body.”

—Forrest Bess, 1953

The "Tree of Life" constitutes not the penis growing on the scrotum but the scrotum as the foliage and the perineum as the trunk and the penis (outer) as the limb or the Branch. It is the 'side' of our body that we do not observe—the neglected side; that which is in darkness. That 'side' that God showed to Moses. Below shows both the tree in alchemy and in an actual photograph—



Fig. 151. Adam as *prima materia*, pierced by the arrow of Mercurius. The *arbor philosophica* is growing out of him.—From the "Miscellanea d'alchimia" (MS., 14th century), 20, vii.



Now, let us turn toward the stone itself; here is a passage from alchemy in John Read's *Prelude to Chemistry*—

After all this upon a day
I heard my noble Master say,



Fig. 150. The penetrating Mercurius.—From the "Speculum veritatis" (MS., 17th century), 20, liii.

men patient and wise,
Stone with Exercise;
were trewlie taught,
r that Stone they Caught;
)or scarcely one,
gdoms had our Red Stone. (P.W.Martin: Experiment in Depth)

ite Stone (see the Mandala—The Greek at Betty'
penetrating Mercurius was the act of open-
rein lies the Christian mystery. The trunk
e same—the snake possibly representing the

Figure 30 - A page from the *Ballet*, from the series of letters to Meyer Shapiro, 1953. Image courtesy of the American Archives of Art at the Smithsonian Institute.

We must consider his mental state when viewing pieces from his "thesis". The page from his *Ballet* consisted of text explaining the images he collected. The *Ballet* revealed his new obsession with alchemy (Smith, pp 73).

Bess had been previously reading the works of Carl Jung and genuinely believed that his riddle of internal conflict was solved by combining Jungian theory, aboriginal symbols, alchemy, and his surgical procedure. The result was his painting, and those messages sent from his unconsciousness were not merely dreams but signs from another world. Seen in Figure 30, is a page featured from the *Ballet*. The collage features a drawing of a man with a large tree growing in place of where his genitalia would normally be. The text at the top half describes a metaphor of how it is “The Tree of Life” growing on the scrotum, and like how “God showed Moses,” the phallus to which we can access God as well. At the bottom, there is a man, identified as Mercurius⁷⁴, being penetrated by two men with a sword, while standing against a tree. On the top right corner, the collage features a small photograph of a man’s phallus and scrotum⁷⁵. For Bess, perhaps those feelings of conflict post-op were replaced with a sense of euphoria and confidence when the information he researched seemingly legitimized his behaviour.

Having completed his body of research for his “thesis,” Bess shared the work with a small collection of people; amongst the recipients include his gallerist, Betty Parsons, Carl Jung, American President Eisenhower and Meyer Shapiro. The reaction was not exactly what Bess had anticipated. Jung did see the “thesis,” but responded in a 1953 letter that the discovery Bess had made

⁷⁴ It is not entirely clear who Mercurius is. In the text, it states in fragments *was the act of open...lies the Christian mystery...*

⁷⁵ In comparison to Figure 25, and considering Bess’ mental state, the image is most likely of himself.

was “not unique, [and] it has been found possibly once a century from the beginning of time. It invariably leaves the individual with the feeling that has made the great discovery” (Jung, Carl, *Jung letter to Bess*, 1953). His gallery declined to exhibit his newfound discoveries, some of his colleagues felt indifferent, while others dismissed his behaviour (Smith pp 92-94). After this point, Shapiro and Bess experienced a halt in their correspondence. Perhaps this shift in events was too dramatic of a change for his colleagues to comprehend. Bess seemed desperate to find someone to justify his research, but the reaction proved otherwise. Filmmaker and author Chuck Smith describes in his extensive research on Bess how his friends responded in a series of quotations taken from people ranging from a fellow fisherman, Gerald Ludwig, who questioned if “[Forrest] was coming out of the closet”; to sculptor Gertrude Barnstone explaining this surgical procedure (performed by the aborigines), “was a form of birth control”; to Dr. John Money⁷⁶, who explains that the pieced genitalia is in actuality a sign of “totemic allegiance” and only meant for an “elite group of people” (Smith, pp 96).

Currently, no real copy of this “thesis” exists; throughout his correspondences, Bess did not keep copies, would often pay people in paintings, rip out pages from his notes to share, and in a comparison of his letters I have found that his thoughts remained inconsistent, clumsy, and constantly shifting.

⁷⁶ Dr. John Money was a leading researcher in the sex lives of transsexual and hermaphrodites. Bess and Money corresponded for years, and after Bess had his second genital surgery, remained in contact. Money would later feature Bess in the essay, “Three Cases of Genital Self-Surgery and Their Relationship to Transsexualism,” *Journal of Sex Research* 12 (November 1976).

In a 1954 letter to Parsons, he claimed his theory had “two approaches – one fanatic homosexuality and perversion, the other of a possible regenerative quality based upon the Steinach experiments⁷⁷. In another list to long-time correspondent Earle Ludgin, Bess claimed that his procedures and findings for a “pseudo-hermaphrodite” was to be the “desirable and intended state of man; alchemy [pointed] directly...as being the key to regeneration” (Smith, pp 85).

By the late 1950s, Bess continued to receive major solo exhibitions at Betty Parsons’ gallery, however after his rejection from his professional colleagues, and friends regarding his operation, Bess attempted to embark on the final step of becoming a pseudo-hermaphrodite. Throughout much of his adult life, Bess and his parents had been primarily living together in the same home, but in 1960, after his father died of a heart attack, his mother decided to move inland away from the fishing bait community of Bay City, Texas. Feeling alone, and unable to cope with the loss of his father, Bess wished to conclude this theory of immortality.

In 1960, with the help of Dr. Robert Jackson, whom he paid \$100 and a few paintings, Bess sought to “get it right” (Smith, 102). He wanted what the

⁷⁷ Conducted in the early 1920s, the Steinach Experiments consisted of a number of scientific operations performed by Dr. Eugene Steinach on rats and dogs. The results supposedly extended their lives by 25 – 30%. Dr. Steinach placed pressure on the testicular cells and it inhibited testosterone from entering the blood stream. In 1924, a colleague named Dr. Peter Schramm traveled to China and conducted the same experiment on prisoners. Dr. Steinach continued with his work on humans as well. Bess had read about these experiments in H. G. Wells *The Science of Life* and immediately impressed (Smith, 88).

aborigines had: a spliced scrotum, creating an enlarged orifice that would allow him to A) have frontal penetrative sex from a male and B) somehow receive the ability to self-reproduce.

The last figure from Bess' timeline is represented in a work entitled *Untitled*, 1970. In this work we see another horizontally divided painting. It is small and square in shape, however, instead of figures; Bess uses shapes perhaps representative of sexual organs. The top half is painted grey with red hues, featuring three yellow dots and a crescent moon shape. The bottom half is a vivid red, and features a V or U shape submerging inward. These dreamscapes still represented what Bess saw at night. Even after all that he had been through, when he closed his eyes; these images would still come to life.



Figure 30 – Forrest Bess, *Untitled*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 14 x 14 inches. Image courtesy of Hirschler & Adler Modern, New York.

Untitled features a few symbols that can be deciphered from Bess' chart. The crescent moon represents *a young woman*, and the V or U shape is similar to a modified version of the *hermaphrodite*. It is as if this work constructs a message, or key, as Bess would put it, describing himself toward the end of his lifetime. On the horizon was a looming existence – in the dark grey sky or in eternity, perhaps the future or beyond existence, he was a woman; on earth he was to remain static, he was not fully a woman, could not reproduce or carry a child, but had epic dreams for himself. In a 1951 letter to Shapiro he states “my vision is my source unelaborated, I have cause to wonder if there could not be meaning – if there could not be something other than the abstract hidden within

the canvas" (Forrest Bess, Letter to Meyer Shapiro, 1951). Bess died seven years after the completion of this painting, and during this period suffered a tremendous loss. Up to this point he had received six solo exhibitions, but never felt socially accepted. In 1961, Hurricane Carla destroyed Bess' home and studio. Luckily some of his works were salvaged, but he subsequently struggled to make ends meet. He was briefly institutionalised, during which he had to explain the orifice in his scrotum. At this point, Bess' artwork was finally a reflection of his waking life.

Forrest Bess' journey was tumultuous, exciting, pathetic, and mythical. Perhaps his overt self-awareness drove him to insanity. He subjected himself to much scrutiny. His confused, overlapping definitions may not fully explain his interest in the hermaphrodite or androgyny as a person, however the evidence is clear in his artworks. Through the use of symbolism, landscape, and abstraction, Bess expresses his inner androgyny and questions his existence. Is there an alternative to male or female? Can I manifest into something beyond what nature or God has given me? Is it so wrong to take these considerations into one's own hands? Bess made a conscious decision to act upon his conflict. His mental instability may have led to his eventual demise; however, I believe Bess is an example of blurred gender binaries, his visions and dreams were universal questions, and how he sought to answer those questions is up for debate.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions

Since the completion of the thesis, the concept of androgyny has lost much of its mass popularity and we have seemingly moved on to the next social issue. As humans, our attention spans are very limited, and new terms, whether academic or colloquial, are coined every day to describe new forms of sexual orientation, or a new label that cannot be used to describe an individual's preference in fear of offending or political incorrectness. However, the question still stands, as per this hypothesis: has androgyny aided in the creative practice of Kenneth Chau, Martha Wilson, and Forrest Bess?

Each of the case studies provides evidence of different variations and interpretations of androgyny. In order to achieve this, each practitioner used an array of techniques with the goal to reach that altered state of mind. For Chau's practice, transgression occurred when the subject took control of *restraint & hijara*. The subject became alive and existed in his own right, regardless of him being completely fictional and only existing through Chau's methodology of performed-androgyny. For Wilson, her methodology of experimentation with foreign emotions aided her in the clarification of what could have been. These limited engagements helped her understand her many moments of self-reflection. Consider the happenstance that lead to the research that followed between Chau and Wilson, and only coming across Bess' work almost accidentally in passing. For Bess, his violent and confused method may have led to a body of subtly enigmatic paintings, but ultimately it was not successful in aiding him in transitioning to the state of mind he so longed for. Bess

unfortunately did not benefit from the concept of androgyny, as his misinformation led to his untimely death. His legacy of surviving works remains, but his tragic story is what we will remember him by.

During these encounters with androgyny, the research shows evidence that this self-reflective process had the duality of creating enlightenment, and misfortune. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) describes this sense of duality and her encounter with androgyny as "each of us [having] two powers...one male, one female; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating" (Woolf, pp 98). In the context of this research and thesis, on one hand, creating enlightenment lays in how each practitioner can articulate with language and visual media, allowing themselves to express their genuine emotions through their work. However, these abilities have gone the other way, as the research shows in Bess' section. Under these circumstances, the practitioner without careful research and/or technique could find themselves regressing rather than progressing in their practice of achieving enlightenment.

The self-portrait has been defined several times throughout this thesis, but the intention is always the same: each practitioner found it necessary to self-examine through an artistic medium in order to reach a better place, resulting in catharsis, understanding, and unfortunately, in some cases, death. Whether or not that was successful, is irrelevant; their practices engaged with

androgyny – ultimately a mythical, unachievable state of mind. Androgyny is an experience that is spiritual, mental, and physical; it is a cross roads beyond binaries, and is perhaps beyond our current level of understanding and comprehension. It is a state of mind that celebrates different perspectives; an androgynous being is oscillatory in every way.

Acknowledgements

Thank you too my two primary supervisors Dr. Sophia Lycouris and Dr. Susanne Ramsenthaler for your immense support, guidance, and otherworldly patience.

Thank you to my Mom, Dad, and brother, Kevin. A special thanks to Martha Wilson for your generosity. To my extended family Julia Morton, Paul Nesbitt and Jonathan Falconer, you mean everything to me.

And to the landscape of Edinburgh.

Sincerely,

Kenneth

Bibliography

- Apple, J. (2005). A Different World: A Personal History of Franklin Furnace. *TDR/The Drama Review*, 49(1), pp.36-54.
- Apple, J. and Wilson, M. (1977). Correspondence: 1973 - 1974. *Heresies #2 Patterns of Communication Among Women*, 1(2), pp.43 - 47.
- Atkinson, P. (1992). *Understanding ethnographic texts*. London: Sage.
- Auslander, P. and Phelan, P. (1994). Unmarked: The Politics of Performance. *TDR (1988-)*, 38(3), p.185.
- Bakony, E. (1974). Non Verbal Symbolism in the Feature Film. *Journal of the University Film Association*, 26(3), pp.34-38.
- Baudelaire, C. and Mayne, J. (1964). *The Painter of Modern Life*. [London]: Phaidon.
- Baudelaire, C. and McGowan, J. (2008). *The Flowers of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beauvoir, S., Borde, C. and Malovany-Chevallier, S. (2010). *The Second Sex*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Bess, F. (n.d.). *Personal Letters to Meyer Shapiro 1950-1959*. [Letter] Archives of American Art.
- Blocker, J. (2004). *What the Body Cost*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bright, S. (2010). *Auto Focus: The Self Portrait in Contemporary Photography*. [New York]: Monacelli Press.
- Buci-Glucksmann, C. (1994). *Baroque Reason*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bust, A. (1967). The Image of the Androgyne in the Ninetieth Century. In: I. Fletcher, ed., *Romantic Mythologies*, 1st ed. London: Routelage & Kegain Paul, pp.1-86.
- Cook, E. (1985). *Psychological Androgyny*. New York: Pergamon Press.
- Crozier, W. and Greenhalgh, P. (1988). Self-Portraits as Presentations of Self. *Leonardo*, 21(1), p.29.
- Eliade, M. (1965). *Mephistopheles and the Androgyne*. New York: Sheed and Ward.

- Eliade, M., Trask, W. and White, D. (2009). *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Elliott, C., Gober, R. (2013). *Forrest Bess: Seeing Things Invisible*. Houston: Menil Foundation Inc.
- Forrest Bess: Key to the Riddle*. (1999). [film] USA: Chuck Smith.
- Fletcher, I. (1967). *Romantic Mythologies*. London: Routledge & K. Paul.
- Gelburd, G. (1982). *Androgyny in Art*. Hempstead, N.Y.: Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra University, Exhibition Dates: November 6 - December 19 1982.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- Gohatto*. (1999). [DVD] Japan: Nagasi Oshima.
- Goldberg, R. (2004). One Hundred Years. In: A. Heathfield, ed., *Live: Art and Performance*, 1st ed. New York: Routledge, pp.176 - 181.
- Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Heathfield, A. and Glendinning, H. (2004). *Live: Art and Performance*. New York: Routledge.
- Hirsch & Adler Modern. (1988). *Forrest Bess – Exhibition Catalogue*. New York: Hirsch & Adler Modern, Exhibition Dates: April 21 - May 14, 1988.
- Howell, A. (1999). *The Analysis of Performance Art*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Harwood Academic.
- Ishikawa, T. (1995). *Hijra: The Third Sex*. Tokyo: Sei Kyūsha.
- Johnson, D. (1972). *Reaching Out: Interpersonal Effectiveness and Self-Actualization*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Lash, J. (1993). *Twins and the Double*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Lippard, L. (1975). Making Up: Role Playing and Transformation in Women's Art. *Ms. Magazine*, pp.33 - 39.
- Loewenberg, I. (1999). Reflections on Self-Portraiture in Photography. *Feminist Studies*, 25(2), p.398.

- Money, J. and De Priest, M. (1976). Three cases of genital self-surgery and their relationship to transsexualism. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 12(4), pp.283-294.
- Montano, L. (2000). *Performance Artists Talking in the Eighties*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.316 - 321.
- Morimura, Y. (2003). *Daughter of Art History*. New York: Aperture.
- Phelan, P. (2004). On Seeing the Invisible. In: A. Heathfield, ed., *LIVE: Art and Performance*, 1st ed. New York: Routledge, pp.16 - 27.
- Pious, P. and Cortright, S. (1980). *Invented images*. Santa Barbara: UCSB Art Museum, University of California Santa Barbara.
- Ronnberg, A. and Martin, K. (2010). *The Book of Symbols*. Köln: Taschen.
- Roscoe, W. (1998). *Changing Ones*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Roth, M. and Jacob, M. (1983). *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America 1970 – 1980: A Source Book*. Los Angeles: Astro Artz.
- Sedgwick, E. (1993). *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Smith, C. (2013). *Forrest Bess: Key to the Riddle*. Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books.
- Stack, C. (2011). The Levelling Up of Performance Art in the 20th Century. *Art Criticism*, 24(1 & 2), pp.90 - 97.
- Wang, R. (2005). Dong Zhongshu's Transformation of Yin-Yang Theory and Contesting of Gender Identity. *Philosophy East and West*, 55(2), pp.209-231.
- Ward, F. (1997). Some Relations Between Conceptual and Performance Art. *Art Journal*, 56(4), p.36.
- Wark, J. (2001). Martha Wilson: Not Taking It at Face Value. *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, 15(3 45), pp.1-33.
- Wark, J. (2001). Conceptual Art and Feminism: Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Eleanor Antin, and Martha Wilson. *Woman's Art Journal*, 22(1), p.44.
- Wells, L. (2003). *The Photography Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Williams, W. (1986). *The Spirit and the Flesh*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Wilson, M. (2005). What Franklin Furnace Learned from Presenting and Producing Live Art on the Internet, from 1996 - Now. *Leonardo*, 38(3), pp.193 - 200.
- Wilson, M. (2000). Going Virtual. *Art Journal*, 59(2), p.102.

Wilson, M. (1997). Editor's Statement for Performance Art: (Some) Theory and (Selected) Practice at the End of This Century. *Art Journal*, 56(4), pp.2 -3.

Wilson, M. (2011). *Martha Wilson Sourcebook: 40 Years of Reconsidering Performance, Feminism, Alternative Spaces*. New York: Independent Curators International.

Woolf, V. (2002). *A Room of One's Own*. London: Penguin.

Appendix A

Interview with Martha Wilson Transcript

Original Date: November 13 2012

Runtime: 65 minutes 41 seconds



Kenneth Chau: Hello Martha! Today is the 13th of November, and we are recapping the original conversation that happened on Monday Sept 10th when we spoke after your New Forms class at Pratt Institute, but due to technical difficulties we had to revisit, and as you suggested we could "re-perform" as we are both performance artists. You are in Franklin Furnace right now

Martha Wilson: Yes

K: And I am in Edinburgh in my bedroom. Let's pick up where we left off – we are sitting in a diner you are having a spinach pie, and I am having chicken noodle soup and chicken Caesar salad

We first discussed some terms that I had brought up during the class, such as performed-androgyny, performance, pure androgyny itself, and most importantly I wanted to get your opinions on those three terms. How has performance changed since you began you do them, I remember you used the term pieces, rather than performance.

M: Yes, we didn't use the term performance art yet, that didn't come to be till I got to New York. So tell me the terms again,

K: Performed-androgyny, androgyny, and later An-Other over Other. As I reference to Beauvoir's the Other, as I discussed in the presentation how after revisiting and reviewing all this feminist text, I still couldn't understand what Otherness meant, due social and gender reasons.

M: There is a third term, performed-androgyny

K: Pure performance and how you have encountered androgyny

M: Ok, why don't we start with the class presentation you made, and because it made a big impression on the students. They referred to the landscapes in which your body was appearing in class yesterday.

K: What did they say?

M: We were looking at another artist's work, and someone in the class said to me, 'it looks like Kenneth Chau work' isn't that great?

K: Yes that's really cool!

M: Yes, the kind of landscape, the kind of physical attitude, and the kind of action that Kenneth would have done.

K: Where was this artist from?

M: It was on the Elephant Rocks, in New Zealand, they're two women, both of whom came out of dance, [the negatives] flipped so that the images are symmetrical with the line up the middle - one body, one frame, and the other girl is in the other frame, but the positioning within the frame is exactly the same, except it's a mirror

K: You know I find that interesting. I grew up in Vancouver, and whenever I've met other artists who have grown up on coasts, in this kind of landscape on the water, Edinburgh as well, Japan, and island cultures, artists have a very similar aesthetic, and I guess it's because the availability of what you can do with the land. Then you employ our other factors, and this is what happens. That might be really interesting to [further explore] other artists that practice in this similar way due to geography, and the intrinsic similarities that occur.

We discussed how your reasons for calling something New Form, over performances. You talked about how New Form has evolved from what it used to be, pieces, or previously performance art, and the how New Form applies to various media for the purposes of creativity and visual stimulation.

M: Kenneth I have late breaking news. The fine art school has renamed my course to Relational Practice! It's not New Forms; they've changed everything and guidelines. It's a much better term because it's about the history of how performance often, installation, and other process orientated work such as street works are performed in a social context. So it foregrounds the media, which is really irrelevant, you can make a film or video no problem, that's not even the important thing at all: *the important thing is where it lies in the social context.*

K: So this term has evolved since we've encountered it then!

M: New Forms is Old!

K: We've moved on from that! How exciting. I encountered New Forms for a month, and now it's evolved; that's how fast performance changes and it's become Relational Practice! How are the students by the way?

M: Well you know I have 12+ students, and we're getting close to the end of term, and we're deciding what to do for our final projects. The hurricane took away a class, and we have a second MFA review day, so we only have 3 classes left to do final projects.

K: And it's such a diverse range, not just photographs or images. As I wrote to you in previous emails, I was basically bedridden for the month of October, and it was such a nightmare, but as a result, I started developing a new performance piece, in relation to that.

M: In relation to your illness?

K: Well I lost my voice, and that's always been part of my identity

M: The fear.

K: Yes, and so many of my tutorials have been focused on the aesthetic, the face, as my past working in fashion, and being a fashion model before - always being very aware of the way I look, and whether or not that would change the photography. And I would always respond by saying, "Yes that's a valid question but I would never know the answer because how could one know if I wasn't going to do some medical change. Which wasn't something I was interested in. But as a result this made me very interested in your work, which is very androgynous as it spoke to both aspects of the male and female. But this new performance my mine [extended from the fact that], I didn't bathe, I lost so much weight, I'm so skinny already as you know. I lost like 10-12 pounds, and one day I finally took a bath - I washed my face, shaved, and I looked at myself in the mirror, and I found myself obsessed with the image that I saw. I've never felt that I was narcissistic in that sense because I've always pushed aside the physical aspect of the self, because that was always me after all, but I found myself continuously touching my face, the skin and this person that was in front of me. So as a result I thought it might be an interesting to produce a performance piece or portrait in which I remove my reflection completely; how would I learn something about myself during this process? If I don't have a reflection or its avoided, or documented through some form of temporality through video or photography. Of course I can still groom and still look the way I do, but go into social situations after day 1 of looking like this, and 10 days looking like that how is it different or would it change? It's still very new; I just developed it from the past 10 days.

M: Some of the students found research about Mirroring, it's a babying stage they go through, where they figure out that the person in front of the mirror is me. It's a psychological step. It teaches and makes them realize that they have a place in the world. Although I never studied psychology, I never really thought about it, and now can't remember who developed it. Might be interesting to move forward with in terms of research.

K: I think its Freud (have clarified that it's actually Lacanian), I took one psychology course in college and I remember cramming for it, this was a major thing we had to do. I remember sleep cycles and mirroring...I have this book; it's called *The Book of Symbols* published by Taschen of symbolic archetypes with short and concise descriptions. I never look in the index and just open it, relying on happenstance, and I always find something applicable to my studies. Right now I'm looking at Masks, its divided into animals, the spirit world, plants, bridges etc, and even how vomiting has been present in visual culture, great reference point for my work. But we'll see how my new performance goes

M: Is this new work you're working on explicitly related to illness?

K: Well it was catalyzed by illness, but it could speak for other things as well, still undeveloped. I just found that I never found or saw myself that way. I looked at myself before the bath, and I looked at myself after the bath, and it was two completely different people. I became such a recluse, maybe becoming depressed as a result, I didn't know if I was getting better, and the only social contact I had was with my doctors, I was unable to do any work or talk to anyone either or I'd just be fatigued or tired. I've been very sick in the past before, but never ill for that long.

M: Do you know what it was?

K: I had a throat infection, and then I was okay, and then I traveled to Brussels where I believe I caught Flemish Flu. And then I was okay for about three days, and then I was out. The major thing was losing my voice and not being able to communicate. My handwriting is so terrible there was no way for me to write everything on a notepad.

But I remember you discussed androgyny as something that wasn't called androgyny per say in the 70s, but you felt androgynous. There was a grant you applied for and the only reason they didn't accept you was because you wanted to remove your breasts?

M: Both of them! I wanted both of them removed to in order to have a male profile.

K: Would you say this was out of spite?

M: Spite? More like jealousy. I believe it was Leno Ezano that recognized "Men

have power, women don't" and one of her pieces was to decide to reject the society of women, which she did. Because women don't have power. I thought to myself, I really didn't look like a woman, I had straight hips, and I looked like a beanpole with some boobs, and I thought I could pass as a man. It was called the Creative Artist Public Program. But there was no public service involved. They did not give it to me because they knew I was going to do it.

K: Was this after you moved to New York from Nova Scotia, where you first started doing public performance art pieces?

M: I moved to New York, and applied to cut off my boobs immediately!

K: I guess everything happens for a reason. One thing I found so important when I first encountered your work was there was an immediate connection in that I understood your practice, I understood your intention - full of satire, and humor but it was also the use of exploring these foreign places. That was the first initial point I made and understood and just got it.

I encountered your early work as very reflective of your social life; you mentioned your boyfriend and you broke up, and other social engagements such as the one you had with Lucy Lippard. Does that this often occur in your process and creative practice? I remember there was a hold in your work, practical of course, because you started Franklin Furnace.

M: Well it stopped for a while because I was tired of being alone and staring at my belly button. So I started collaborating with women artists from 1978- 82, so social context was very important. I didn't have many friends, especially in Halifax, but as soon as I got to New York, I found about 50 other weirdoes who were willing to work with.

K: Were you intent or see yourself as making art, defining yourself as an artist. When you call it pieces, were they just a way to define what you were doing?

M: We were definitely positioning ourselves socially as artists, but art that had commercial value was considered to be stupid. We were doing art that had social protest or other purposes, but not commercial salability, not something that could be hung over your couch. We saw it as rebellion against the commercial works.

K: There was one anecdote where you described to me a collaboration, it was primarily lunch at the Plaza, and every single time someone had a question, you had the hired photographer to reply "Yes"

M: We wanted to make "projection" possible. Was that Vogue magazine? Yes. Was that the National Review? Yes.

K: Does audience interaction drive your work? Is there a percentage or number

value or is it more spontaneous?

M: We can never know how the audience will interact, we can hope, but we don't know what it will be. Once upon a time, I was playing Nancy Reagan, when Ronald Reagan was elected for the second term, and these were all my friends there, and some of them screamed at me, "THIS IS NOT FUNNY" [as I was playing her] and they spat on my dress and me! So I did not realize, or how stupid of them to not know that I wasn't Nancy and was a performance artist, and took out their anger on me! All while also knowing it was satirical...

K: Right, and when I think about performance and when I see performance art being produced, I always see the difference between [hand gestured angled lower] performances, and "performance" and my intention is I want to do something in the middle. You have to learn that you can't take yourself too seriously. Throwing yourself against the wall isn't going to cure cancer, but sometimes throwing yourself against the wall isn't going to do anything for anyone either, and you have to quickly decide and determine where you are - like stand up comedy, you have to just go through with your piece, and stick with your gut, and sometimes it can be a hit or miss.

That's what I really enjoyed about the class now, as you know my school now it's strictly individual study. I loved sitting around in a circle and how we read to each other *The Art of Noises* by Luigi Russolo. It's seldom that I get a chance to read in a circle, and then secondly when you said "Everyone's going to do a Futurist Performance piece" on the spot, it was really amazing. How everyone was just game for it and up for it, ranging from subtle performance or that really violent one.

[Brief interruption]

Could you further expand on the foreign emotions you went through these invasions? I remember you said when you were in a relationship, you kind of became that person, and after you went your separate ways, you were trying to find out whom you really were. While you were together, you listened to the same music, ate the same food, being and living in the same space. Was that the intention when you [sought out] to experience these foreign emotions?

M: Yes, but I think it was worse than what you described. After Richards left me, I had to find out *whom experimental me* was and [whether or not] and what it felt like to be [for example] a gay man dressing him up as a woman, or whatever. To go into foreign places [helps you] find out that's in here (points to her heart), so I had to go out there to reflect who was in here. And it consisted and continues because when I impersonate Barbara Bush for example, it's very liberating to be someone who is objectionable, hateful, and incorrigible *temporarily*. I get to go home and take the wig off, and Barbara is gone. But I was able to travel to Barbara-fiction for period of time.

K: Travel is not just physical but a different state of mind, another reality.

M: And keeping yourself in that reality, I was just performing for a group called Art in Places as Barbara, and in the end of the performance, I started to be Martha. It was like the spell was wearing off!

K: Like Cinderella.

M: Yes, [at a certain point] I started answering questions as Martha not Barbara, and just said the hell with it! I broke character!

K: At the end of a shoot, to whoever is present, I often say, "I'm back to pumpkin-mode." I'm turning back into a pumpkin. The elaborate process of becoming that, for example today I made a very quick video-tutorial of just the subtle makeup and things I do before I don on the headpiece, and what the physical transformation. And I remember we compared steps we both go through, how I like to put on the head before I put on the costume, whereas you like to put on the costume before you put on the head.

M: Can you explain why you do that?

K: Well I think I like to put on the clothes as the person, not Kenneth putting on a costume.

M: I can see that...

K: I think it also has to do with my background is in photography; I want everything to go as efficiently as possible, make no mistakes. But the more time I can wear the wig: of course I'm going to wear it. It has to do with the hair. I find it really exciting. I made my undergraduate thesis creating a whole monarchy of people. My favorite roles to play were the female roles with the long hair. And I remember buying a human hair wig at a transvestite shop on 14th street, and I was so excited, the first thing I did was shower with it - that's what made the person.

M: Did that destroy the wig?

K: No, because it was human hair and you could treat it as your own. It's the first thing I clarified with the transvestite at the shop, was "Can I wash the hair?" and he said, "Girl, you can do anything you want" then he said, "You could put it up or down etc.," and I thought "Don't touch me!" ...But, yes, washing it was the first thing I did, and difference between synthetic hair and human hair.

I guess hair plays a big role in your work as well, since its part of the physical transformation. Does hair represent time to you?

M: *Growing old*, part of my show at P.P.O.W. in 2011, were literally photos of my

hair growing out. It had been red for literally half of my life from the age of 30 - 60. Henna inking it really, and letting it grow out meant admitting my age and letting the time and watching the time go by.

K: I have seen the video and photograph for *I have become my own worst fear*, but how accurate is that for you, when you see yourself, and think about it in retrospect? Because you made that piece so long ago [and all that time has passed], had you not made it then, would have still called it your worst fear or changed that?

M: In the videotape in 1974, I say, "I'm making myself as ugly as possible, and it makes me feel better that I don't look like this all the time." But if I make myself look like this, I can understand that I'm not like this all the time, it's kind of like an insurance policy to know how bad you could possibly look, and so you feel better.

K: Knowing that you could immediately escape, I think that's something about performance and performing as someone else or, as I have brought up in *performed-androgyny*. It is about having the ability and being aware of that androgyny, and placing it into a social context. Last time, when I brought up the term I remember you had an almost immediate response.

M: Yes, with *performed-androgyny*? I think its important to keep the word *performed* in front of *androgyny* because it places a time with it, whereas *androgyny* is static. *Performed-androgyny* means you are purposely dressing yourself up to be a woman or whatever. So it's a more detailed description about the process and less about the result.

K: It allows you to understand the form, the method, and the intention for whatever which the reason it is you're going for, whether or not it is strictly laying in the realms of science or within performativity.

M: Yes!

K: One thing we discussed as well was the introduction of Goffmann, and how that gave you great amounts of clarity about the performed self. You described it to me during school when a visiting artist...

M: Vito, Vito Acconci

K: Vito Acconci, had suggested you read the book?

M: Yes, he must have heard what I was doing, and said to me this is the book that will help you understand what performance itself is and everything else. Goffman calls it the presentation of the self, which is often conflated with the working title with the performance of self in the everyday life. You're performing as yourself and that's what you're doing - portraying yourself.

K: I have been doing research on Goffman, and it was apparently published here, and they have a society here that gets together every spring - I'll send you the literature and video just now. It's interesting how it's come full circle like here.

M: Why was it published in Edinburgh? Isn't he American? (He is Canadian)

K: Yes, I believe he traveled to the countryside to conduct some research.

M: Oh I see. That's interesting

K: Definitely an example of happenstance. Now that we've encountered each other, had this conversation, etc., it seems things always cyclical. But the one copy I had of Goffman's that I was traveling with was just recalled, so I had to return it, so I don't have a copy with me currently. I guess at this point I should purchase one.

M: It's only very little, but dense.

K: I'm also looking at another one called Encounters - two studies of sociological interaction about fun and games and role distance...Anyway, I think the new performance work that I'm working on is placing more of this sociological reading into practice. The photographic work I had shared with your class was something I had been doing for years before was more about the physical change, traveling to a foreign location and environment to see how you dealt with it, and now I know I can go there and along with this additional research of symbols etc., there is a really good section that can be explored in the written works. I mentioned the hypothetical conversations in my previous works, and I tried to develop a spoken voice for the protagonist in *restraint & hijara*, but now I'm not too sure if that's the best idea. Maybe it was just illness. I think I need to do something melodramatic to his life, instead of just vast amounts of walking in empty barren landscapes.

I was also wanted to point out, as when we last spoke, that before I came to see you in New York, I had written a short paper regarding the similarities we shared in our practices, and [mentioned at Pratt] that it wouldn't be an appropriate to just do a compare and contrast. I wrote about how I felt that you were an androgynous-opposite in our works. Aesthetically our works were very different, and physically we look very different, but the aspect of time and going into foreign territories was very similar. I would love to hear your thoughts on having androgynous opposites.

M: I think we could catalogue a whole array of androgynous opposites, there are old and young, tall and short, male and female, the list could be very long, and yet you're right, at the bottom we're trying to accomplish the same goals, only we're using the instruments we have which are very different.

K: Channeling the right media in order to understand something about ourselves. One thing I've mentioned to newer artists when questioned about process is how I had a professor who didn't allow us to discuss concept until we understood the media, where I've interpreted as "you have to respect the media, and then the media will respect you" before you can be able to have a conversation with it. Do you disagree with that statement? Concept is first?

M: Well I never went to art school, but if I didn't know how to do photo retouching, I'd hire someone to do it. I think the mastery of the technique is irrelevant to the process of art making.

K: I've encountered some students who can talk and talk about it for hours, but have no understanding of how to make it

M: I see your point definitely, and the job of an art school would be to teach you to have these abilities if that's what you want to do. Shall we discuss the term An-Other?

K: Oh yes, that was something I encountered on reading from your work was the term Other(ness), and Simone de Beauvoir. It kept on repeating the black, the Jewess, the woman, and I think instinctually there was something I couldn't understand after continued reading. I came to the decision to place the term AN as a double entendre both to androgyny and to another, in order to classify and explain when I've encountered other artists who work in this manner. Encountering you, for example is definitely An-Other. Would you elaborate on your own previous experience when you've encountered An-Other? You had mentioned something about Lucy Lippard, and I believe something about Judy Chicago, flowers, and teaching you a lot about feminism.

M: I like the term *An-Other* over a harder term which I believe Beauvoir uses - The Other meaning there's some chasm between one and other, whereas An-Other is a softer transition, so you have one and another, and maybe there are differences, but we're on the same team and just approaching the same topic differently - I like that term a lot for that.

With Chicago, I had taken my photo-text work to the feminist art workshop at Cal Arts, in a gymnasium space, no one used the gym at Cal Arts anyway, and Judy had these young women drawing flowers and boobs, tits and flowers all over the walls! So I went and showed my photo-text works and she asked me how I felt about the work around her. I said it looks *prescriptive*. Judy screamed at the top of her lungs, "Don't you understand we're trying to HELP these women here?" This led me to understand that A) my work was not feminist (Do you mean at the time or in today's context as well?) and B) it was ok for a feminist to yell at a young woman as I was. I was so flummoxed by the whole thing that I started to cry and I will never forget the thing because she made me cry!

K: I think the Other feels oppressive to me, and I can't gather or develop an understanding of it clearly maybe because of socio-economic reasons. I can interpret in other respects of my being, but never as a woman, and that's something that I'll never understand. I think that's the core misunderstanding I have with the reading it that it's something that I've never felt it. Of course, I can believe in it and support it, but I just don't have it in me to get it! Which is why the Goffman texts offered such clarity to it because it places a performed element to it and aids you in understanding how (and perhaps why) you do it. I always ask the rhetorical question: can we constantly perform? But I answer it, yes because I'm constantly performing! Even with those closest to you! I remember I told you the story of me attending a lesbian orgy. There are signs of course prefacing your sentences in certain ways (THE NARRATIVE). For my father, I always say *Daddy*, and he just knows something is coming. But he does it to me too. It goes both ways. I use my mother as my primary assistant, and you've met my mother before - we look so much alike that it's a great temporal guide to see how I may look in the near future, but also how to one would respond instinctually.

In performance, of course, you have to assess the practical elements, but it's essentially driven by instinct. How our bodies respond and how your humor and audience interacts with the work you're doing. *Does audience interaction drive your performance? Is there individual performance like Goffman states or is it a constant collaboration?*

M: Yes, in the beginning I thought I could operate solo, but after a while, you figure out you're in a social environment, and the reality is that you're never alone.

K: And that could be your multiple personalities, and also practicalities relying on others to create this message or expressing this concept you're developing.

Calculated and rehearsed emotions, after all, are still emotions, and the constructed qualities in this process aren't fate, but in your experience, *how much do you rehearse before you know what you're doing is the right decision?* As you mentioned you had studied writing over art school, so the performative techniques that you employ are different, [but now] do you have method that can be explained by performative theories or are premeditated or are they spontaneous?

M: Excellent question! I probably can't answer it entirely. I'm not trained as an actor, didn't go to art school. No tools, so I had to feel everything - feel everything around me. And that's how I approach all my performance characters. I don't think I know until...well its 90% unconscious. We're moving furniture in your unconscious all the time, because we don't always know what we're doing consciously. I once saw a shrink for 10 years, and I was saying to her, I'm sitting in this space for hours and hours without doing anything, and she said to me "you must need to be doing that" - so, she validated the

unconscious process you have to go through.

K: I agree, I had a similar experience with a psychotherapist that made me really angry - I never had an answer, but instead it commentary on all my actions. I remember breaking that politeness we had for each other, and I said "I know what you're doing stop it, because I will do the same to you!" But put things into context after all and broke the ice!

The next step now is to expose the stuff that has grown from this encounter and maybe view another artist that works in a similar vein to add a third tier!

M: Let's do this again; we have each other's Skype contact!

K: Thank you so much for doing this again Martha. I'll be in New York mid-December so maybe we can get together. I'll see you soon. Happy Thanksgiving!

M: You too!

The Assistants

For the duration of the research, I required a photographic assistant. Part of the process of creating a self-portrait relies on the help of someone else who is present and aware of the mechanical devices and technologies during the production of each photographic session. What was immediately required was someone who I could feel comfortable enough to perform as this person. In their contributions, I learned how important a role the assistants played, and how it effectively changed the performance itself. This section will focus on the roles of four assistants and how they contributed to *restraint & hijara*. It will be divided into subsections including their names, number of photo sessions, and contributions to the performance. Over time, their relationship with the character grew as my own. Each one brought a quality out of the *subject*, which without them, I would never have had the ability to exhibit performed-androgyny. It was exactly this non-verbal dynamic I had with *the subject* that seemed to mirror the dynamic I shared with the photographic assistant. A series of interviews were conducted asking each ones similar questions following their profiles and contributions.

Assistant 1

Name: Patty Ng

Patty Ng is my mother. She and I worked together on *restraint* from April 2010 to September 2012. Because we share a striking resemblance, I was able to mirror or mimic her gestures in many of the images we produced. Her presence allowed me to not have to rehearse, but play off of her instincts, as we were often in extreme conditions. Her facial expressions, and body language made *the subject* transition comfortably from place to place with her presence. It was through Ng that the *subject* expressed eye contact and affection through his gaze. Please see her interview in Appendix B.

Assistant 2

Name: Dee Chaneva

Dee Chaneva is a photographer based in the United Kingdom. Chaneva and I worked together from March 2011 to March 2012. Chaneva was aware of my relationship to the landscape. Already a photographer, I did not require to instruct her on how to use the camera body. Before each photo session Chaneva would allow me to move through each landscape, building a relationship with each surrounding. She helped me travel to various locations including beaches, forests, and even through a snowstorm. Through Chaneva, I was able to draw out extreme emotions from *the subject*, including profound sadness, seduction, and calmness. Please see her interview in Appendix C.

Assistant 3

Name: Demelza Kooij

Demelza Kooij is a documentary filmmaker currently based in the United Kingdom. We worked together only once on March 2012. Because of her background, Kooij was willing to experiment with film and video, and produce a time-based work. Kooij's presence along with her film recording forced the *subject* to remain in the performance. It was a great challenge and struggle to remain in character the whole time Kooij filmed. I considered this an exercise in sustaining the character's performance

Please see her interview in Appendix D.

Assistant 4

Name: David Stinton

David Stinton is a photographer based in Edinburgh. His interest in landscape was the initial reason why I wanted to work with him. His presence as a male challenged the *subject* greatly. To which, I am still currently drawing conclusions on. In our interview we discuss flirtation, and the sexual aspect of my work. It was never a question that the poses were suggestive, but for me, these repeated gestures did not *feel* sexual. It was a character study that could constantly be revisited, and the sexuality was secondary. Through Stinton, the *subject* exhibited gestures and triggered emotions that seemed to move inherently from myself the person. This signified the use of a male assistant.

Please see his interview in Appendix E.

Please refer to the portfolio to view 30 completed works from *restraint & hijara*. This work is on-going and continues my research on performed-androgyny.

Appendix B

Interview with Patty Ng About Assisting and Process Transcript

Date: 10th September 2013

Kenneth Chau: From the very beginning of *restraint*, you have been my primary assistant starting all the way back in April 2010. We have shot in Hong Kong, China, and New York. Briefly, could you reflect on your experience overall?

Patty Ng: It was an eye opener for me when we shot for the first time in Shanghai in 2010. I had never experienced anything like this before. Gradually I watched and learned from you. I could see there was a lot of preparation before each shooting.

K: Through this specific landscape we traveled to, and you know this was different in my process since you are my mother, and we already had a previous working relationship with Luna Regnum and Venus, but this new character you saw come to life from the very beginning. What was the initial interest that drew you into this?

P: There was a story for all the character you performed as. That's how I saw it and felt. I would want to see what the story would become.

K: While you watched, did you feel you saw a transformation? I recalled you said something to me about how it just switched on and off?

P: Yes, I did. While we were preparing the set up, you would explain to me the timing and etc. patiently as yourself. Once you were in front of the camera, you would become another character.

K: Did it seem like a different person then?

P: I think so. You seem to become so direct and natural with the landscape or shall I say 'you become the landscape!

K: Do you think the performance itself came to life from the landscape? We have so many to look back on!

P: I have wondered at this sometimes. I could see the continuance of the character with each landscape when we were shooting. But each time you were so different. I hope you understanding what I meant.

K: What did you feel from our last shoot with the straight portrait from the images and previous sweeping landscape ones?

P: As I remembered, we always shoot at the very harsh environment. I meant the temperature was very extreme, either very hot or so cold! We finished the work quite fast! I found shooting the straight portrait is easier for me. Might be because the lighting was better! Each time we used the natural light.

K: Did you see or feel a sense of communication happening, not only the non-verbal communication, but communication centred towards 'others' around us both metaphysical and physical around me. For example, during the shoot, when I photographed myself, I did communicate with you and gave you direction said now, etc., I felt like to a certain extent sometimes I let you take control of it, and then I took a step back and let you observe and play. That was an interesting shift for me since I'm normally in control, but I realised this machine wasn't something I could control.

P: Oh yes. I am the type who would like to do all the detailing. As I mentioned before, this is all new to me. Sorry if I have all the questions and interrupting. The more we worked together; I learnt and followed your direction easier. I am usually supposed to be the one in charge!
I quite agreed with you. I was quite happy that you let me carried away sometimes. You do like to control!

K: Since all of our works are still photographs, I have to clarify that during the process there is a lot of verbal communication, and we are looking at each other, but it was instinctive or intuitive that you knew where to follow and I knew where to put my face or body against the landscape. There was a cohesion that occurred at that moment - it just worked. I think that was a challenge for me as a performer communicate to you what the intention is and to be to be constantly on, and the interruptions. Also as my mother, we look so similar, so it was good mirror to play off of, whether you were aware of my studying you or not. The performance is living after all for those moments. Did you feel you were interrupting something or watching something you shouldn't be seeing? Did you ever feel like I was performing for you specifically or anything?

P: I didn't feel that you were performing just for me. I felt that you felt comfortable enough of me that I could assist your shooting.

K: So I was performing for something then but not necessarily you?

P: It shows in your work.

K: Would you say that the character or being was androgynous? With this definition - at first I was interested in the physically androgynous, But over time, I've done more self-inquiry and self-reflective work, and later have come across definitions that it is a higher state of mind - would you say this being was androgynous?

P: I think so.

K: Is it successful in doing that?

P: Your work has improved gradually. I am so happy for you

K: This is really helpful that you've had these insights Mom. Two more! Do you think there were repeated gestures that you saw?

P: There is a pose you love to do. The one you arched your back and had your head tilted a bit and also your mouth opened a little bit. I think you have shot enough of this pose!

K: Ever offended by any of it? Or did you feel this is so private I shouldn't be looking at this?

P: Why should I be offended?

K: One more question actually. When you saw me driving, we get to location, I set up, and then I put on the costume and become this person. How does that make you feel?

P: Amazing! That's why I never turn you down when you asked me to assist.

K: Did you see it as the costume perhaps?

P: The costume only helps other to follow the character easier.

K: I mean when I take it off, I'm back to normal.

P: That's what a performer does. You can switch from one character to another.

Appendix C

Interview with Dee Chaneva About Assisting and Process Transcript

Date: 29th July 2013

Kenneth Chau: You shot with me from March 2011 till March 2012. In between that time, we even lived together. This was a significant period for this series for *restraint & hijara* as you played a vital role as the assistant. From shoot to shoot we went from places like Dunbar, Corstorphine, open fields, snow storms, you name it we did it all, but we were always consistent with our practice and you seem to understand my modes of behaviour really well. You were my primary assistant for roughly a year and you took me to places I could never have dreamed of. I was relying on you to show me the land, and thus as was the character. And we always ended up going to McDonald's to celebrate! Could you reflect just briefly your experience that day?

Dee Chaneva: Celebrate is indeed the right word! It always felt incredibly important to find the right location, create the right atmosphere, communicate between each other about getting the right shots, that if all of these elements (plus weather, your state of mind, my focus) came together and created the world you needed for your shoot, it was worth a celebration! And who doesn't like a Fillet-O-Fish?

K: Through these specific landscapes we travelled to, did you ever get a sense of how I was going to potentially perform? What was the initial interest that drew you into this?

D: I knew you needed time on your own with each and every landscape, I could sense that you were trying to find your body and the character in that particular setting, but I would never know what the end result will be, what side of your character will be revealed and explored.

K: While you watched, did you feel like you saw a transformation?

D: I certainly did. Initially it seemed like a performance but the more I observed you and the way the environment permeated you, it seemed to me you became a different being. You seemed to reflect the waves, the rocks, the sky or snow, and become someone else.

K: Did it seem like a different person then?

D: Yes and no, I could see the transformation but you kept giving me directions with a familiar voice so I didn't feel too alienated. Speaking of aliens!

K: Do you think the performance itself came to life from the landscapes?

D: To a huge degree I think so. You always attempted to create a world for the being you were (are) exploring and the landscape is a big part of making sense of it I think.

K: Did you see or feel a sense of communication happening, not only in the non-verbal communication, but communication centred towards 'others' around us both metaphysical and physical around me. For example, during the shoot, when I photographed myself, I did communicate with you and gave you direction said now, etc. I think after the first couple of shoots we had our own silent language where you would let me step back and let you observe and as I played. So how does communication play differently or if I did play different during a photographic session with myself?

D: I think we were very lucky to find a way to work with each other, as it took us very few goes to develop the silent communication where I knew what shots would be suitable, to know when it made sense to press shutter. I think from the very beginning I felt inspired and drawn by the visuals you were creating and had a quiet understanding of the creature roaming those landscapes. I knew it needed solitude but I knew you, as the artist needed an observer. I truly believe that communication was always part of the process, and not just a necessity in order to have someone to press the shutter.

K: Would you think the session would've changed if it were a portrait rather than a self-portrait?

D: Absolutely. Giving yourself the space and time to tap into the metaphysical realm would never have worked if you had to have someone else do it for you. I firmly believe only you can portray that being, as it is a matter of instincts to be followed and not necessarily a set of criteria to be fulfilled.

K: In some of the contact sheets, you and I know both know there was verbal communication, and we are looking at each other, but it was instinctive or intuitive that you knew where to follow and I knew where to put my face or body against the landscape, or we both felt the wind. There was a cohesion that occurred at certain moments, you know like on the rock in Dunbar and I just my face mimics the shape of the piece of rock that was lit up by the dusk. I think that was a challenge for me as a performer all the attention is on me, but my co-stars is the landscape. Does that sound crazy? Interruptions are part of performance and we could always stop because it is still photography after all. Did you feel you were interrupting something or watching something you shouldn't be seeing?

D: very rarely so, I think you were enough in control of both the reality of the shoot and the other reality of your character that even when we had to stop and break character, it seemed to me you never lost track of him. I did occasionally feel like I was watching something quite personal and observing you take on a new character was like watching someone change their clothes in the bathroom, to put it bluntly, but my nature in itself is that of curiosity and rarely embarrassment so I didn't feel uncomfortable. And yes, it sounds crazy to most

people, but not to me as I see landscape almost the way you do, as a personality and a fluid environment we can adapt and take forms in.

K: I think before we worked together there was more of a work hierarchy going on, I mean during a shoot of course there still is, but when we got know each other well, you knew my moves and what I liked etc. Did you ever feel like I was performing for you specifically or anything?

D: I think the hierarchy stayed, at least for me (in the best possible way, I never felt like your slave or anything), as I have huge respect for the process that had to take place and the subtlety I had to impose on my presence in order to be able to sense what and when you wanted. I don't think you were performing for me, but I do think after we became friends, you were more relaxed and whatever you did, you knew I'd talk to you about it, and assist as best I could. Did you perform for me?

K: So I was performing for something then but not necessarily you?

D: Yes. I would think you were always conscious of the end result, of the world that will end up on a contact sheet, but at the same time you wanted to be someone else entirely. Who the overseer of this whole thing was, only you know.

K: Would you say that the character or being was androgynous? With this definition - at first I was interested in the physically androgynous, but over time, I've done more self-inquiry and self-reflective work, and later have come across definitions that it is a higher state of mind. Would you say this being was androgynous?

D: I considered it more of an asexual being - as in the case with angels. No woman, no man, a creature all of its own sort.

K: Is it successful in doing that?

D: Yes certainly, I think you created your own sexuality, one that involved attracting the metaphysical, the natural and the imagined, instead of human sexual attraction.

K: This is really helpful that you've had these insights Dee. Two more! Do you think there were repeated gestures that you saw?

D: Yes, It's hard to describe them, without mimicking them. You often trace your fingers across your face before we shoot. Or bare half of your shoulder.

K: Did you feel this is so private I shouldn't be looking at this?

D: Sometimes, but never in a bad way, more like fascinated.

K: Ever offended?

D: No, but as I said before, I am very difficult to get offended or embarrassed. It's a personality trait.

K: One more question actually. When you saw me driving, we get to location, I set up, and then I put on the costume and become this person. How does that make you feel?

D: Initially a bit shocked, as I didn't know what to expect! But once you set off among the snowy hills, I understood.

K: Did you see it as the costume perhaps?

D: The costume is essential I think, although I always felt that one day you won't need it.

K: I mean when I take it off, I'm back to normal.

D: I think you have a few seconds of cooling off period where you almost don't want to let go, but then we mention McDonald's and you're back to normal.

Appendix D

Interview with David Stinton About Assisting and Process Transcript

Date: 4th of September 2013

Kenneth Chau: We work together just once last winter around December 2012. This was shoot significant to me because of the use of a male assistant. Prior to our work, I had never used a male assistant, so when I reflect back on the work itself, I feel like the aesthetic changed with a male presence. Could you reflect just briefly or generalise your experience that day?

David Stinton: It was a very cold day - it had only recently snowed. It transpired that I was underdressed considering the amount of time we would spend out in the open air. I remember we worked for a few hours before the light started to fade. Initially scouting for a good location within the gardens to make the work, before getting down to the business of making the photos.

K: I think at this time, you were still rather unfamiliar with my practice, and it was more experimental to say the least. But we went to my back garden for this session. I remember you sat there on the bed as I donned the costume, headpiece first, gown second - What were you thinking about how I was going to perform at time? What was the initial interest that drew you into this?

D: I was mainly concerned with performing myself - i.e. ensuring I used your equipment correctly and didn't mess up the photographs. I don't remember having any particular expectations, I was intrigued to see your practice as a photographer myself, I had only seen a little of your work online and while we make different kinds of work it is always interesting to me to see what another artists' method entails.

K: While you watched during the shoot, did you feel you saw not only a physical transformation? I recall it being the first snow (a repetition from a previous shoot) but the light was running low and it was getting tremendously cold.

D: I'm not sure how you mean a physical transformation; I felt that you grew into the space. Before the performance, as we searched for a set, I saw you searching for something that you could relate to physically and you interacted with the space once we began to shoot, as a result you grew cold (the ground you lolled upon was frozen) and your movements stiffened.

K: Did it ever feel like a different person was in front of you?

D: Not exactly, it was always you in front of the camera; you were always directing me and closing when to shoot. I feel that if this had not been a barrier I may have seen things a little differently perhaps, being able to view the character more closely rather than having the interjection of you directing.

K: Do you think the performance itself came to life from the landscape?

D: Absolutely, you responded very intimately to the environment.

K: Did you see or feel a sense of communication happening, not only the non-verbal communication, but communication centered towards 'others' around us both the metaphysical and the physical things around me. - remember there was a girl running laps at the time. For example, during the shoot, when I photographed myself, I did communicate with you and gave you direction said now, etc. We had to work quickly due to the light constraints, but since you already were a photographer yourself, I knew a lot of direction was needed. So how does communication play differently during this process while working with me?

D: In terms of metaphysical communication, you were clearly communicating some sort of affection for the nearby environment with your bodily movements. I'm not sure of what you mean by the metaphysical things around you. As you say, little communication was needed to direct me in operating the camera and I understood your direction quite clearly.

K: Honestly, I think the greatest challenge was using a male assistant. I have to be frank- I've always found you to be very attractive, and because of that, the performance itself could relish in that flirtatious energy; there were poses and faces in there that I would never do for my mom. Did you notice an aesthetic change or quality while I performed?

D: I did feel that the performance was charged with a flirtatious energy, your movement, expressions and the shapes you made were all very sexual, at the time I felt like you were performing for the camera.

K: Now did you feel you were interrupting something or watching something you shouldn't be seeing?

D: No, I felt comfortable watching the performance and entitled to be there as your assistant. None of your sexual moves were enough to make me feel uncomfortable.

K: Did you ever feel like I was performing for you specifically or anything out there?

D: I felt like you were performing for the camera mainly but part of the process for this was to engage with your imagination, as if the camera and myself weren't there and you were alone with the environment experience and intimate moment.

K: So I was performing for something then but not necessarily you?

D: Yes, for a figment of your imagination if I can put it that way without sounding disparaging.

K: Would you say that the character or being was androgynous? With this definition - at first I was interested in the physically androgynous, But over time, I've done more self-inquiry and self-reflective work, and later have come across definitions that it is a higher state of mind, would you say this being was androgynous?

D: In terms of what I would consider androgyny I would say that you are physically androgynous. As a product the character you were channeling would appear so physically. In terms of a higher state of mind I think the fact you were channeling a character is indicative of a higher state of mind, in a way that a child can tap into the energy of another character and play a game that involves engaging their imagination to be someone else.

K: Is it successful in doing that?

D: Certainly.

K: This is really helpful that you've had these insights David. I may have two more. Do you think there were repeated gestures that you saw?

D: The arching of your back insinuated a state of pleasure.

K: Ever offended by any of it? Or did you feel this is so private I shouldn't be looking at this?

D: I am rarely offended; I'm a thick-skinned Yorkshireman. Besides, it was essential for me to be observing.

K: One more question actually...what were your thoughts on the character itself? Empathetic? Otherworldly? What emotions come to mind when you see him come to life in front of you? As I switch between Kenneth and the character?

D: The character was emphatically otherworldly, quite frail, flamboyant, and emotional. The costume I considered strange and atypical considering my field (western). The character was stimulated by the environment and seemed to experience sexual pleasure from interacting with it.

K: Someone suggested earlier that it was perhaps an idealised version of myself.

D: Perhaps, you are very excited by the natural world, I wouldn't consider that I know enough about your true self to say whether it was idealised as I think you are self-aware enough to present the self that suits the occasion.

Appendix E

Interview with Demelza Kooij About Assisting and Process Transcript

Date: 5th of September 2013

Kenneth Chau: You shot with me once, around springtime 2012, but this was a significant shoot because although we only did one, we experimented with film for the first time for this series for *restraint & hijara*, which was new to me. The location was in Dunbar was well, and I remember we ended up with a beautiful still image from the one roll we did in the end because of time constraints and we didn't get to go to McDonald's after. Could you reflect just briefly your experience that day?

Demelza Kooij: Briefly? I don't know but from which perspective?

K: In general

D: Very interesting, I felt I learned a lot, and surprised at times, and the one thing that mostly surprised me was I thought it was very short. I thought it would take much longer for some reason. I was expecting more or less going to watch a play in a way, or someone who would take a character for a really long time, but at some point we got there, when I let the camera run. I was also struck by how well you pose. You're not shy to strike a pose.

K: Through this specific landscape we traveled to, and you know this was different in my process because before I was relying on my previous assistant to take me, but now I was taking someone, were you thinking about how I was going to perform? What was the initial interest that drew you into this?

D: Initial interests, well I like you as a person and willing to collaborate with you on anything. I was hoping I could do it right and one way or another compare to your previous assistant. What I also found interesting is that at some level I didn't understand what you quite wanted with the project, and if I could see with my own eyes I could understand better.

K: While you watched, did you feel you saw a transformation? I recalled you said something to me about how it just switched on and off?

D: Yes, we did two things, first we did the taking photographs then film, and I think we should've done it the other way around. I thought since film is my medium, and not as confident with a still camera, especially when I was filming, I felt a connection with you, and also think through my perception that you came more into terms with what you were exploring because of the time. I let the camera run, and there were no instructions, so I remember this one moment you were looking straight into the camera, and although the gaze was mediated by the camera, but I was shocked by that.

K: Did it seem like a different person then?

D: I think so, if anything it felt very honest, a very direct uncontrived look. I had a feeling it came from somewhere quite deep.

K: Do you think the performance itself came to life from the landscape?

D: I don't know I'd have to do it in a different landscape to answer that question.

K: What did you feel in this situation from the images and previous footage?

D: Well yeah, there are some very striking images there, and you blend in incredibly well, but I don't know if the performance would change in a different landscape. It's difficult to tell.

K: Did you see or feel a sense of communication happening, not only the non-verbal communication, but communication centered towards 'others' around us both metaphysical and physical around me. For example, during the shoot, when I photographed myself, I did communicate with you and gave you direction said now, etc., but when you filmed me, I felt you took control of it, and then I took a step back and let you observe and play. That was an interesting shift for me since I'm normally in control, but I realised this machine wasn't something I could control. I couldn't control the assistant either since was your tool. So how does communication play differently during this process between the two mediums?

D: Definitely, I think you communicated better with the landscape in front of the video camera because I think it took more time. I filmed for 15 to 20 minutes without switching the camera, and with speaking to you and speaking to me, with interesting communication happening erupt between you and landscape, and you and camera.

K: Well with some of the footage, there isn't verbal communication, and we are looking at each other, but it was instinctive or intuitive that you knew where to follow and I knew where to put my face or body against the landscape, or we both felt the wind. There was a cohesion that occurred at that moment - it just worked. I think that was a challenge for me as a performer since in film you have to be constantly on, and the interruptions would hinder the performance in some way, at least maybe in a LIVE work. Did you feel you were interrupting something or watching something you shouldn't be seeing?

D: No! I felt like we were creating something and not interrupting. There was that moment when you looked at me and I thought to myself oh my god, I'm watching something very private, yes, but I didn't feel interrupting but it was intimate.

K: I think before we worked together and knowing you were a documentary filmmaker that is kind of your job to watch and observe, and then see how it goes from there when we initially started. Did you ever feel like I was performing for you specifically or anything?

D: No, I think you had something bigger in mind, and I was just sort of vessel through which you were communicating through

K: So I was performing for something then but not necessarily you?

D: I think you were performing for undisclosed audience that wasn't me specifically.

K: Would you say that the character or being was androgynous? With this definition - at first I was interested in the physically androgynous, but over time, I've done more self-inquiry and self-reflective work, and later have come across definitions that it is a higher state of mind
Would you say this being was androgynous?

D: Yes, like I said, when you asked if I was performing for you, and I said no, and I said something undisclosed. Nothing you could specifically point out, but it was something - something behind the camera, so very open. If androgyny is a higher state of mind, non-specific state of mind that doesn't want to choose...

K: Is it successful in doing that?

D: If you follow that definition then yes.

K: This is really helpful that you've had these insights Demelza. Two more! Do you think there were repeated gestures that you saw?

D: Yes, I think so, in the original footage, you lay down on a rock, you get up and then you get back onto the same rock - I think that's a repetition.

K: Ever offended by any of it? Or did you feel this is so private I shouldn't be looking at this?

D: No I was invited. You didn't seem to be bothered.

K: Ever offended?

D: No!

K: One more question actually. When you saw me driving, we get to location, I set up, and then I put on the costume and become this person. How does that make you feel?

D: I was weirder out at first, but then maybe that has to do with how I am, as soon as I switch on the camera. I think, but I think differently in visual terms, not social terms, or whatever. I don't really judge like that.

K: Did you see it as the costume perhaps?

D: I had a feeling that I was looking at a very honest version of you, someone that you wanted to be. I'm not sure I was watching an act outside of you.

K: I mean when I take it off, I'm back to normal.

D: I don't think I see that much change in the character and you

K: Perhaps an idealised version of myself.

D: Yes, maybe!

Appendix F

Selected Works from *restraint & hijara*

14 Photographs

10 Enlarged Contact Sheets

3 Film Stills



restraint & hijara: snow study, 2011



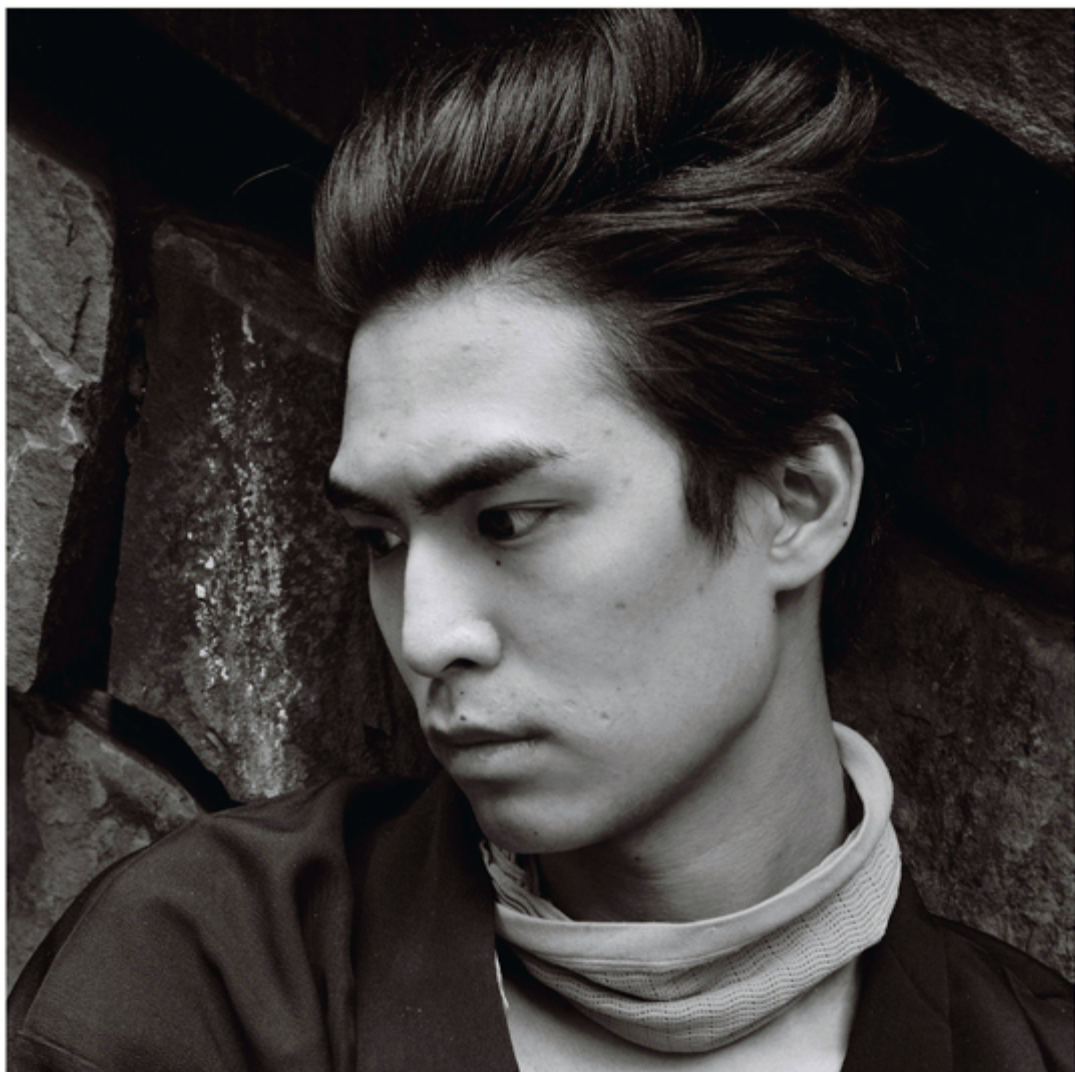
restraint & hijara: mountain study, 2011



restraint & hijara: mountain study, 2011



restraint & hijara: mountain and twins study, 2011



restraint & hijara: rock formations study, 2011



restraint & hijara: rock formations study, 2011



restraint & hijara: rock study, 2011

Infrared Film Test

Enlarged Contact Sheet



restraint & hijara: ocean and rock study, 2011



restraint and hijara: ocean and rock study, 2011

Enlarged Contact Sheet



restraint & hijara: ocean and rock study, 2011

Enlarged Contact Sheet



restraint & hijara: tree study, 2012



restraint & hijara: tree study, 2012



restraint & hijara: tree study, 2012



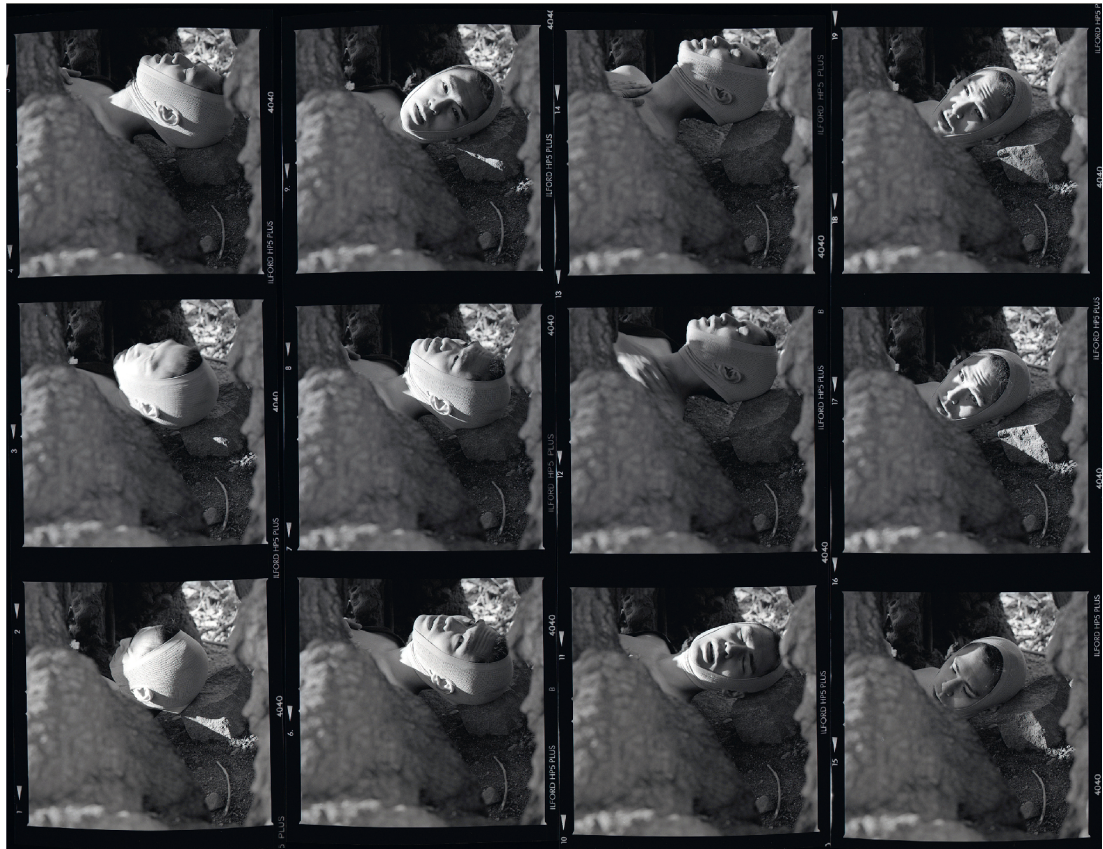
restraint & hijara: tree study, 2012

Enlarged Contact Sheet



restraint & hijara: tree study, 2012

Enlarged Contact Sheet



restraint & hijara: tree study, 2012

Enlarged Contact Sheet



restraint & hijara: cliff side study, 2012



restraint & hijara: cliff side study, 2012



restraint & hijara: low tide and rock study, 2012



Three film stills from experimental film study, 2012



restraint & hijara: tree study, 2012



restraint & hijara: grass and snow study, 2012

Enlarged Contact Sheet



restraint & hijara: grass and snow study, 2012

Enlarged Contact Sheet

